NAZI GERMANY AND THE VICHY FRENCH LEVANT

(SYRIA AND LEBANON)

Said Ibrahim Kreidieh

Cover page: Flags of the two French Vichy Levant states,
Lebanon and Syria (first row from left to right),
and the flags of Vichy France and Nazi Germany
(second row from left to right)

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Nazi Germany and the Vichy French Levant (Syria and Lebanon)

By

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Introduction

In modern times several European powers competed in extending their hegemony and protecting their interests in the Levant. Germany was almost outside this Levantine game. In fact, Germany did not become an important power in Europe until 1871 when all the German states united under the auspices of Prussia to form the German Empire with Berlin its capital. From that date until the end of the Second World War Germany had much fewer interests and ambitions in the Levant in comparison with other European powers such as France, Britain, Russia and Italy.

Germany "had no traditional connexions [sic] with Syria, stood close to no community in it, had no Muslim subjects, and was a newcomer to the Eastern world."[1] In general, during the 19th century Germany, like the Ottoman Empire, had "an interest in stymieing the advance of other powers in the Near East, and by the end of that century a number of influential German foreign policy thinkers had become intrigued by the potential of Pan-Islam as a revolutionary force to blow up the empires of Russian, British and French rivals."[2]

The aim of this work is to study the Nazi German relations with the French mandate states in the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) during the Second World War when they were under the domination of the French Vichy government. The rule of this

[1] Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1958), p. 40.

[2] Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering empires: the clash and collapse of the Ottoman and Russian empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 26.

government in these states extended from the capitulation of France by the end of June 1940 till July 12, 1941 when Britain and Free French forces ousted the “Vichists” from the Levant. During this period Germany did not have fervent interest in the area in comparison to that of Britain and France; the Nazis rather authorized their ally, Italy, to manipulate and handle matters in the Levant and later during the Allied attack on the Levant, Germany was engaged in preparing plans to invade the Soviet Union.

However, the Nazis did not completely abandon the French Levant. Between summer 1940 and February 1941 the Germans sent agents to the French mandate states in the Levant to disseminate Nazi propaganda and to collect information which seemed essential to the Germans. On the other hand, Germany did not disregard the strategic position and the logistic factors of these states to utilize them when the need arose and that what happened when Germany used the airfields and the weapons stores in Syria and Lebanon to ship arms to its allies in Iraq after the anti-British coup of Rashid Aali Al-Kilani in April 1941. This step besides other developments in the area and in Europe stimulated the British and the Free French to invade and occupy these French mandate states in June 1941. Yet the Nazis did not strongly intervene during this invasion to support their Vichy government ally, they had at the same time more critical and decisive engagements in Libya, the Balkans and the Soviet Union.

Another remark could be deduced while exploring the strategy of Germany towards the Vichy French Levant states during that period and that is the imperialist attitude towards the people and the governments of these states, the Nazis just like the other imperialist powers of Europe pursued policies to maintain their interests without taking any consideration to the aspirations or even views of the natives, though many Levantines regarded

Germany as a friendly power in encountering the imperialist West and the Zionists.

Finally, being, an Arab, Levantine, and Lebanese I hope this work would contribute to the understanding the modern history of the Levant and will activate awareness in the conscience of my fellow citizens which would lead to a wise and pragmatic policy in communicating with other nations.

Said Kreidieh

Beirut - Lebanon

Chapter 1

The Germans and the Levant till the outbreak of the Second World War

Where is the Levant

Although the term "Levant" has no explicit definition in the geographical sense, it has been reiterated by European diplomats. One of these definitions states that it is "a name applied to the countries along the E[astern] shore of the Mediterranean and including all the bordering countries i.e. Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt. In a more restricted sense it refers only to the non-European coastlands. The parts of the former Fr[ench] mandate over Syria and Lebanon were called Levant States".[1] Another definition indicates that the Levant "(from the French *lever*), "to rise," as in sunrise, meaning the east), historically, is the region along the eastern Mediterranean shores, roughly corresponding to Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria. The name Levant States was given to the French mandate of Syria and Lebanon after World War I, and the term is sometimes still used for those two countries, which became [completely] independent in 1946".[2] These definitions coincide to a large extent with Arabic geographic term of "Bilad Al-Sham" which includes modern Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan. This term was mentioned in

[1] Leon E. Seltzer, *The Columbia Lippincott gazetteer of the world* (Morningside Heights, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 1046.
[2] "Levant". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 Jul. 2021, https://www.britannica.com/place/Levant. Accessed 23 May 2022.

most of the Arabic works and writings which took up the study of that region in different domains and aspect.

Based on these definitions the term "Levant" will be used in the following lines to refer to Syria and Lebanon which were part of the French mandate till 1946 when French troops left the Levant.

The Germans and the Levant before the Unification of Germany

Prior to the German unification of 1871, and due to their political fragmentation into several states (see *Map – 1* in Appendix 4), the Germans did not play influential political role in the Middle East until the forties of the 19th century. However, they had obvious activities in some religious, educational, commercial and health fields.

The early presence of the Germans in the Levant could be traced back to the Crusades. The Germans had Biblical interests in the two Lebanese cities of Sidon and Tyre. Accordingly, the German Branch of Order of the Knights of St. John (*Johanniter Orden*) possessed some properties there. On the other hand, some German studies and reports were issued describing the conditions of the Crusaders mainly in the County of Tripoli and in the Levant in general and depicting the relation of its Christian population with the West mainly the Maronites.[1]

During the middle of the 19th century, the German interests in the Ottoman Levant[2] started to shift from religious frameworks to the field of education. German schools were opened in Aleppo, Beirut[3], Sidon, and Mount Lebanon to promote the German culture

[1] Abdul Raouf Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin* [Germany and Islam During the 19th & 20th Centuries] (Beirut: Al-Furat, 2007), p. 302.
[2] The Levant became under Ottoman rule since 1516.
[3] See picture *P -1* in appendix 2.

and language as well as to undermine the French cultural influence in the region. Nevertheless, France's hegemony over culture and education remained prominent over there.

In the commercial field, some German states had established ties with the Levant since the Middle Ages. The export-import operations were carried out through traditional trade land routes and via European ports on the Mediterranean Sea such as Marseille and Trieste. Between 1718 and 1840 Prussia and other German states signed commercial agreements with the Ottoman Empire but the outcome was not successful as expected due to the weaknesses of the German commercial role in the Levant besides the absence of sea lines between the Levant and the German coasts.[1] This situation lasted till the end of the 19th century when sea lines started shipping directly from Germany to the Levant.[2]

In addition to education and commerce, the Germans were interested in social welfare and health care. In 1860 the German religious body Kaiserswerther Deaconesses Association (*Kaiserswerther Diakonissen Verein*) built an Orphanage in *Mina Al Huson* area in Beirut named *Zoar*[3] *Waisenhaus*[4] (Zoar Orphanage). In 1861 the *Johanniter Orden* established a hospital in Sidon, but it encountered problems caused by the decrease in the number of patients in addition to intramural quarrels between

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[1] Abdul Raouf Sinno, *Al masaleh al Almaniya fi Surya wa Falastin, 1841-1901* [The German interests in Syria and Palestine, 1841-1901] (Beirut: Maahad al Inmaa al Arabi, 1978), p. 223.

[2] Anita Gilleo, *German activities and German Arab relations in the Fertile Crescent countries, with emphasis on the current century,* MA thesis, American University of Beirut, 1968, p. 26.

[3] Meaning "A place of refuge; a sanctuary" derived from Hebrew name of one of five ancient cities in the Jordan valley, mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 19:22, 23, and 30 as the place whither Lot fled with his wife and two daughters to escape death when Yahweh destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah
[Source: https://www.yourdictionary.com/zoar]

[4] Sinno, *Al masaleh al Almaniya fi Surya wa Falastin*, 1841-1901, p. 163.

Druzes and Christians after opening the door to non-Christians. These developments besides competition from a newly inaugurated French hospital in the city urged the *Johanniter Orden* to move its hospital to Beirut after 13 months.[1]

The hospital in Beirut was located near the Prussian consulate and other Prussian foundations, and hence it was known to the public by the *Prussian Hospital*, and later a pharmacy and a dispensary were added to its activities.[2] Between 1871 and 1917 the hospital's doctors were recruited from the professors of medicine at the Syrian Protestant College, which later became the American University of Beirut. Around the year 1900, eight deaconesses from *Kaiserswerth* supported by local nursing staff were responsible for the care of about 500 patients per year.[3]

On the other hand, Prussia was among the signatories of a series of international conventions known as the *Règlement Organique* (Organic Regulation) ratified between 1860 and 1864 by the Ottoman Empire and major European Powers (Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Prussia and Russia) in the aftermath of the 1860 communal strife between the Muslims and Christians in Mount Lebanon and Damascus. The *Règlement Organique* led to the creation of a political entity in Mount Lebanon known in Arabic as *Mutasarifiyya*. (See maps: *Map – 1* & *Map – 2* in Appendix 4)

The Germans and the Levant after the Unification of Germany

After their victory in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the completion of their unity in 1871, the Germans kept on their scant

[1] ibid, p. 174.
[2] Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, p, 306.
[3] Christian Kirchen, *Traces of Germany in Lebanon, the Johanniter hospital in Beirut*, https://www.goethe.de/ins/lb/en/kul/sup/spu/20919610.html.

interest in the Levant but they pursued a new strategy that focused on undermining and defying the French hegemony in this region and mainly in present-day Lebanon.[1] This policy was adopted to impose compromises with Paris in any political settlement in Europe and overseas. To realize this approach, the German consul in Beirut paid an unexpected visit in 1871 to the Maronite Patriarch in Bkirki[2] in an attempt to compete with France in protecting the Maronites. The French consul on the other hand viewed this visit as a violation of France's right in Mount Lebanon and regarded the Maronite feedback as cool and nonchalant. When the Franco-German relations deteriorated during the eighties of the 19th century, Germany sent its warships to the Levantine coast to inform the French indirectly that their interest in this region is related to their attitude towards Germany in Europe.[3]

Another facet of the German policy towards France in the Levant was the visit of the German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II to Syria and Palestine during the months of October and November 1898. "The Kaiser was among those fascinated with Islam, going so far to declare on his visit that the world's 300 million Muslims had in him an eternal friend."[4] The Kaiser started his journey with Istanbul on 16 October 1898; then he sailed by yacht to Haifa on October 25. After visiting Jerusalem and Bethlehem, he went back to Jaffa to embark to Beirut. On November 5, he reached this city and was welcomed by the *Wali* (Governor) of Beirut and around 50.000 persons among them many students who had a holiday for this special event besides members of the German community, and on the next day he visited the *Prussian Hospital.* In Beirut he was

[1] Sinno, *Al masaleh al Almaniya fi Surya wa Falastin*, 1841-1901, p. 272

[2] A village in Keserwan area was at that time part of the *Mutasarifiyya* of Mount Lebanon.

[3] Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp. 324 -325 & p. 336.

[4] Reynolds, p. 26.

given the title of "Hajj"[1] by his friends and the *Qabadayat*[2] of the port as a gratitude for the friendship he showed towards Muslims and for his visits to some mosques.[3]

On November 7 he took the train passing the cities of Aley and Zahle (both located in the *Mutasarifiyya* of Mount Lebanon) to reach Damascus.[4] He stayed in Damascus till November 10 before moving to Baalbek. In Damascus, he visited its souks and historic monuments including the tomb of Saladin.[5] In Baalbek he stayed one night and was impressed by the relics and antiquities of the city, and upon his return to Germany, he sent an excavation mission to search for more relics in the city besides the inscriptions and the rock reliefs carved into the limestone rocks around the estuary of the *Nahr al-Kalb* (Dog River) north of Beirut.[6] The sojourn at Baalbek was the last station of the Emperor's journey. Thereafter, he left for Beirut. On Saturday, November 12, he returned from there on his ship to his home country.

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[1] A title given to any Muslim person who performs Pilgrimage to Mecca.

[2] Qabadayat plural of Qabaday which is a Turkish word that means valiant. But in Beirut it meant the valiant man who often helps people in their community and resolves local disputes peacefully [Source: *Beirut's "Qabadayat*", https://languagewave.com/2020/04/02/episode-19-beiruts-qabadayat-valiant-men/

[3] Iskandar Riyashi, *Qabl wa Baad wa Ruasa Lubnan kama araftahum* [Before and after and Lebanese presidents as I knew them], introduction by Usama Ajaj Al-Muhtar (Beirut: Al-Furat, 2006), p. 259.

[4] Abdul Raouf Sinno, *The Visit of the German Emperor William II to the East 1898 as Reflected in Contemporary Arab Journalism*, https://www.academia.edu/39600903/Abdel_Raouf_Sinno_The_Visit_of_the_German_Emperor_William_II_to_the_East_1898_as_Reflected_in_Contemporary_Arab_Journalism, pp. 13-14.

[5] Known in Arabic as *Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyoubi* صلاح الدين الأيوبي , a Muslim leader who became the first sultan of both Egypt and Syria, and was the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, he led the Muslim military campaign against the Crusader states in the Levant and defeated them at the decisive Battle of Hattin in 1187, and thereafter took control of Palestine—including the city of Jerusalem—from the Crusaders, who had conquered the area 88 years earlier.

[6] Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp. 330-331.

The French authorities did not look with satisfaction upon this visit and sought covertly to obstruct the journey. These intentions were leaked through German reports which disclosed French plans to assassinate the Emperor in Egypt or Palestine.[1] On the other hand the German consul in Beirut mentioned in a report dispatched to Berlin in September 1898 that the French will instigate the Maronites in Mount Lebanon to express their reluctance towards the Emperor's visit. The authenticity of this report was plausible as the Maronites in Keserwan and Maten areas disobeyed the orders of Naum Pasha, the *Mutasarif*,[2] and did not show any gesture of greetings to the Emperor in accordance with their loyalty to France.[3]

In accordance with the approach of causing discomfort to France in the Levant, Germany supported plots drawn by Enver Pasha[4] and Talaat Pasha[5] to weaken the French influence in *Mutasarfiyya* of Mount Lebanon. This plot aimed at establishing a Khedivate[6] rule in Syria under Ottoman sovereignty headed by Yusuf İzzeddin Efendi the crown prince of the cousin of Sultan Muhammad V of

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[1] ibid, p. 326.

[2] Means the ruler or governer of the *Mutasarifiyya*.

[3] Lahad Khater, *Ahd al Mutasarifin fi Lubnan, 1861-1918* [Epoch of the Mutasarifs in Lebanon, 1861-1918] (Beirut: The Lebanese University, 1967), p. 156.

[4]Born on Nov. 22, 1881, in Istanbul and died on Aug. 4, 1922, near Baldzhuan, Turkistan [now in Tajikistan] Ottoman general and commander in chief, a hero of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 against Sultan Abdul Hamid, and a leading member of the Ottoman government from 1913 to 1918, he married Najiya Sultan the niece of Sultan Abdul Hamid. [Source: "Enver Paşa", https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enver-Paşa].

[5] Born in 1874, Edirne, Ottoman Empire [now in Turkey]—died March 15, 1921, Berlin, leader of the Young Turks party [which was against Sultan Abdul Hamid], Ottoman statesman, grand vizier (1917–18), and leading member of the Ottoman government from 1913 to 1918. [Source:
"Talat-Paşa", https://www.britannica.com/biography/Talat-Paşa].

[6] An autonomous tributary state of the Ottoman Empire, established and ruled by the Muhammad Ali Dynasty of Egypt, the ruler of this state is called Khedive who is defined as: a viceroy of the sultan of Turkey (source: "Khedive", https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/khedive).

the Ottoman Sultan (Rashad). In January 1914 the German Ambassador in Istanbul visited Enver Pasha and informed him that the German government supports entirely the "Khedivate plan" and realized that it is the best means to consolidate the dominance of the Ottomans in Arab land and to enhance their relationship with people of that region. He added that the German government is ready to assist the Ottoman Empire in fulfilling this project which will lead to the abolition of the international political privileges bestowed to the *Mutasarifiyya* of Mount Lebanon. Enver from his side replied that the project had been confidential and had not been discussed on an official basis.[1] Germany, from its side was interested in this project because it would replace the Anglo-French influence in the region with German supremacy. But the government in Berlin demanded that the *Mutasarifiyya* would be granted administrative independence by the Khedivate of Syria only in the domains of budget and the workflow of the employees.[2] But the *Mutasrifiyya* project was not materialized due to the death of the crown prince[3] and to the outbreak of the First World War with all its political repercussions and consequences.[4]

Apart from the rivalry with France, the Germans had cultural interests in the Levant and these were manifested in publishing German research and studies about that region, especially in the fields of history, geography and heritage.[5] As for commerce, the early twentieth century brought the German flag to Levantine ports, followed by its commercial travelers, its banking and

[1] Aziz Bek, *Surya wa Lubnan fi al-harb al-alamiya* [Syria and Lebanon during World War], translated into Arabic by Fuad Midani (Beirut: Al-Ahrar, 1932), pp. 75-76.
[2] ibid, p. 76.
[3] Some stories mention that he committed suicide, others accuse Enver in assassinating him (Aziz Bek, p. 77).
[4] ibid, p. 77.
[5] Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp. 307-309.

insurance companies, and its hotels.[1] Nearly all of the Great Powers of Europe along with the United States competed in the fields of education while Germany concentrated its attention on trade. In the majority of the commercial centers of the Levant, at the turn of the 20th German exports exceeded imports. Approximately 100 German firms established branches and depots in Aleppo, Beirut and Damascus supported by a large force of traveling salesmen who were dispatched by German firms to the Levant. Assisted by low prices, dependability in delivery and flexible conditions for payment and other practices less favorably looked by the French, the German business in the Levant increased substantially. In 1905 the *Atlas* line of Bremen established regular service to Beirut, and then others followed.[2]

In the First World War, Ottoman Empire joined Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria in a coalition known as "Central Powers" against France, Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and the United States whose coalition was known as "Allies" or "Entente Powers", accordingly the Levant was not an enemy territory for the government in Berlin. Consequently, Germany increased its influence by offering more support to its educational and commercial institutions in the Levant to encounter the hegemony of France, Britain and Russia. Germany even took a bolder attitude when its submarines sailed in 1915 along the Levantine coast and some of their sailors landed on the beaches and were welcomed by the German community. But this spectacular show provoked the enemies of Germany and the Ottoman Empire who retaliated by bombarding the Levantine coast.[3]

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[1] Longrigg, p. 40.

[2] Gilleo, pp. 25-26.

[3] Aziz Bek, pp. 123-124 & Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, p. 333

On the other hand, the government in Berlin sought to approach Arab nationalists in the Levant by inviting them to visit Germany besides issuing and distributing publications in Arabic featuring Germany as a friendly country.[1] Furthermore; German propaganda spread via the German consulates in Syria and Palestine claiming that the emperor and his agents in the empire had become or about to become Muslims.[2] In accordance with the rapprochement policy with the Muslims, Emperor Wilhelm donated in June 1915 a chandelier to the tomb of Saladin in Damascus.[3]

Moreover, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent to Beirut in 1915 Max von Oppenheim who was the head of the *Nachrichtenstelle für den orient* (Orient News Agency) to activate the German propaganda and to get in touch with Arab nationalists for supporting Germany and the Ottoman Empire against France and Britain.[4] Oppenheim with other German political strategists were studying plans for a possible *jihad* (Muslim holy war) to be turned into revolt against Britain and its allies and organized by German agents and conducted by leaders paid by Berlin or Istanbul.[5]

To encounter the anti-Ottoman propaganda circulated by the Allies, the authorities in Istanbul had set up a news agency bureau to refute the rumors against the Ottoman Empire. This bureau opened branches in the Levant and Palestine but soon it turned into a German agency for espionage and propaganda run under the

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[1] Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp 332-333.

[2] Donald M. McKale, "Germany and the Arab Question in the First World War." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, Apr. 1993, p. 238. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209308700946.

[3] Aziz Bek, p. 225.

[4] Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp. 334-335.

[5] C. L. Sulzberger, "German Preparations in the Middle East." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1942, p. 664, JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/20029184.

supervision of the German spy Karl Hübel.[1] By 1915 the Germans established in August a "club" in central Beirut at Burj Square and named it *Muqtataf al-Akhbar* مقطتف الأخبار (News Extract). To disguise the espionage features, the Germans displayed inside the club newspapers and magazines and posted on its walls drawings relating to the emperors of Austria and Germany besides the Ottoman Sultan and military leaders of the Central Powers. The Germans entrusted the management of this club to Muhammad Effendi al-Rayyes, who was a pro-Ottoman Beiruti personality, while the full responsibility of the club was entrusted by Karl Hübel. This club remained functioning till the end of the First World War.[2]

At the beginning of 1917, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent Curt Max Prüfer, an intelligence agent, to study local German propaganda, particularly in Syria and Palestine. Prüfer proposed that Germany should change the approach of its propaganda, which portrayed Germans as superior warriors and industrialists, and emphasize in return on their peace-loving nature and identification with Turkish culture. He urged halting the Pan-Islamic and military themes of German propaganda as well as stopping the dispatch of German language materials to the empire. To replace them, he suggested sending Turkish and Arabic translations of German novels, films, plays and other cultural materials. However; the idea of moderating German nationalism received little attention in Berlin. "The German War Ministry ordered that Syria be sent propaganda consisting of German for Arabs, German for Syrians, German school primers, German letter-writing manuals, commercial manuals."[3]

The German espionage activities were not steered exclusively towards the Allies, but managed to gather information about the

[1] Aziz Bek, p. 47.

[2] ibdi, p. 292.

[3] McKale, pp. 244-245.

situation in the Levant and to infiltrate into the Ottoman intelligence system by hiring Ottoman officers and soldiers. With this strategy the Germans were able to recruit one of the escorts of Jamal Pasha who disclosed information about the Pasha's movements at work and even at home with his family.[1] The German authorities paid for this espionage project 100,000 Golden Marks per month to their spies and secret agencies who received the amount via *Deutsche Orientbank*.[2]

Following the fiasco of the German-Ottoman attack on the Suez Canal in 1915 the British switched from defense to offense. On December 9, 1917 the British entered Jerusalem, while Arab forces headed by Emir Faisal I[3] and the British army took Damascus in October 1918. The remainder of Syria was occupied in two operations: the first a British column fought its way along the coastal region of the Levant through Tyre, Sidon, Beirut and Tripoli, and the second combined British-Arab forces moving in a parallel direction successively captured Homs, Hama and Aleppo.[4] On 30 October 1918 the Armistice of Mudros was signed ending hostilities in the Middle Eastern theater between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies of World War I. This military change enabled the British with their French and Arab allies to achieve decisive victories, and by the end of the war in 1918 all of Palestine, Iraq and the Levant became under their control.

With the defeat of the Central Powers and the withdrawal of the Ottomans from all the Arab lands, German interests and activities

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[1] Aziz Bek, pp. 291-292.

[2] ibid, p. 292.

[3] Faisal I, (born on May 20, 1885, Mecca Saudi Arabia and died on September 8, 1933, Bern, Switzerland), Arab statesman and king of Iraq (1921–33) who was a leader in advancing Arab nationalism during and after World War I. [Source: Faisal I, King of Iraq, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Faisal-I].

[4] George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, 3rd. edition (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 59.

became mostly inactive in the Levant which was henceforth turned into a French overseas territory.

As the Ottoman rule in Arab lands ended, Faisal set up an Arab government in Damascus, under British protection, in Arab controlled Greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan). In May 1919, elections were held for the Syrian National Congress, which met the following month. On 7 March 1920, Faisal was proclaimed King of the Arab Kingdom of Syria (Greater Syria) by the Syrian National Congress government. In April 1920, the San Remo conference gave France the mandate[1] for Syria and Lebanon, which led to the Franco-Syrian War. The French were victorious in the Battle of Maysalun (near Damascus) on 24 July 1920, and Faisal was expelled from Syria.

In the Levant, henceforth the French mandate region was subdivided into six states based on religion: the state of Damascus (1920), Aleppo (1920), Alawites (1920), Jabal Druze (1921), the autonomous Sanjak[2] of Alexandretta (1921), and the State of Greater Lebanon (1920), which became later the modern country of Lebanon.[3] (See *Map – 5* in Appendix 4)

The reason why France and not other country was rewarded the states of the Levant must be sought in the long historical association between France and these countries which began as early as the crusades.[4]

On 28 June 1922, *Al-Itihad Al-Suri* (*The Syrian Federation)* was created compromising the states: of Damascus, Aleppo and the

[1] Mandate is an authorization granted by the League of Nations to a member nation to govern a former German or Ottoman territories. The territory was called a mandated territory, or mandate. [Source: "Mandate", https://www.britannica.com/topic/mandate-League-of-Nations].

[2] A Turkish word means a subdivision of a vilayet

[3] The Maronites were the majority at that time.

[4] Lenczowski, p. 309.

Alawite State. Jabal Druze and Greater Lebanon were not part of this federation. The autonomous Sanjak of Alexandretta was added to the state of Aleppo in 1923. The Alawite state seceded from the federation in 1924 and the states of Aleppo and Damascus were united into the State of Syria, with effect on January 1, 1925. On May 14, 1930, the State of Syria was declared the Republic of Syria and a new constitution was drafted. In 1936 Jabal Druze and the Alawite State joined this new republic. The Republic of Hatay (previously known as Sanjak of Alexandretta) was founded in 1938 and in 1939 it became part of the Republic of Turkey (see *Map – 5* in Appendix 4). The British from their side applied the mandate system on their acquired share of the Arab lands which was Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq.

And thus a new political order was established in this area replacing the supremacy of Istanbul with that of London and Paris. All these changes including the introduction of the mandate took place without the consent and the share of the local the population who found themselves scattered among new political entities governed from Europe in new form of colonialism.

In Europe, Germany was exhausted in 1918 and sued for peace in desperate conditions, and on 28 June 1919 the Germans signed the peace treaty of Versailles which held Germany responsible for starting the war and imposed harsh penalties in terms of loss of territory, massive reparations payments and demilitarization. This was followed by internal unrest, the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the formal surrender to the Allies. A constitutional federal republic was proclaimed known as the Weimar Republic whose name is derived from the city of Weimar, which hosted the constituent assembly that established its government.

Berlin was still the capital but this new republic had profound changes in its boundaries and territories losing 13 percent of its

European territory more than 27,000 square miles, and one-tenth of its population between 6.5 and 7 million people. (See *Map – 2* in Appendix 4)

Weimar Germany was in no position, politically, economically or militarily to challenge the new realities after 1918. In 1924, Gustav Stresemann, the German foreign minister said: "In foreign policy, we have hitherto pursued a narrow and limited course, and so perhaps we shall continue for a long while. We are going through the tribulations that must attend the policy of an unarmed nation."[1] Moreover; from 1924 Stresemann worked for rapprochement with Britain and France in an effort to revise peacefully most of the provisions of the Versailles peace settlement,[2] accordingly, the Weimar Republic did not engage in any tangible relations with the Levant, due to the restrictions of the Versailles Peace Treaty and to avoid any friction with France which occupied the area after the war.[3]

After losing in the First World War, many Germans were dissatisfied with the new situation and they longed for a return to the Empire. In 1930, the global economic crisis hit. Germany could no longer pay the war debts stipulated in the Versailles Peace Treaty with the Allies. Millions of Germans lost their jobs and the country was in a political crisis as well. This discontent gave a boost to the rise of Nazism, and in 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor and later he eliminated the Weimar Republic and

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[1] Eric Sutton (ed), *Gustav Stresemann: his diaries, letters and papers* (London: Macmillan, 1935), v.1, p. 317.

[2] Francis R. Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 28.

[3] Hilal Thajil Jalewi & Raghd Faisal Abdul Wahab, "Al-asalib al-Diaeyah li Almanya wa Italya fi al-Bilad al-Arabiyah Ashiyat al-Harb al-alamiyah al-thaniya, dirasa wathaeqiya" [The propaganda methods of Germany and Italy in the Arab countries on the eve of World War II, a documentary study], *Majallat Adab Al-Basra,* no. 60, 2012, p. 161.

replaced it with the Third Reich,[1] turning Germany from democracy to authoritarianism.

Following these political changes and the economic and social crises in Germany which emerged by the end of World War I, the Germans had kept hardly any ties with the Near East, only 1800 Germans lived there,[2] while several Levantine student pursed studies at German universities in law, medicine, literature or history, these students were placed in a peculiar position.[3]

On the other hand, France appointed in the Levant Henri Gouraud the first High Commissioner who was installed in Beirut. In 1923 he was succeeded by Maxime Weygand but for strictly political reasons he was replaced by Maurice Sarrail in 1924 who was a militant anticlerical unaware that in the Middle East religion is much more than a conviction but the very source of one's identity.[4] In 1925 he provoked the Druze revolt which was a real war lasting several months. Artillery, aircraft and tanks were used. When the revolt reached Damascus he shelled the city and bloodily crushed the revolt. This attack prompted international outrage and condemnation and France's reputation and prestige were collapsed. Consequently, he was recalled to France on 30 October 1925 and was replaced by Henri de Jouvenel. During the period of his successor Henri Ponsot a relative state of calm prevailed in Levant. Damien de Martel who took over the high commissionership after

[1] Third Reich, official Nazi designation for the regime in Germany from January 1933 to May 1945, as the presumed successor of the medieval and early modern Holy Roman Empire of 800 to 1806 (the First Reich) and the German Empire of 1871 to 1918 (the Second Reich).

[2] Henry de Wailly*, Invasion Syria, 1941: Churchill and De Gaulle's forgotten war*, translated by William Land (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), p. 69.

[3] Goetz Nordbruch, "Arab Students in Weimar Germany – Politics and Thought Beyond Borders", *Journal of Contemporary History,* Volume 49, Issue 2, 2014, p. 275. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009413515533

[4] De Wailly, p. xiv.

Ponsot declared on March 1, 1936 the instruction of his government that a treaty between France and Syria on the model of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty would be concluded.[1] And thus a Franco-Syrian treaty of independence and friendship was signed in 1936, assuring Syrian independence within a period of three years and was to be sponsored by France for membership in the League of Nations within the same period as well, besides conferring France the right to maintain two air bases no more than 40 km from major cities and to permit French land forces to stay in the Alawi and Druze regions for five years; moreover, French military instructors were to advise the Syrian army and France was to supply it with armaments and military equipment.[2] The Syrian government immediately ratified the treaty, but this decision was not submitted for acceptance in the French Parliament (*Assemblée Nationale*) in Paris. Also, a Franco-Lebanese treaty of independence and friendship was signed in 1936 within three years besides assuring Lebanese entry to the League of Nations during the same period besides keeping French troops on Lebanese soil. Many Lebanese politicians did not consider these troops as an occupation force as long as the presence of military barracks and airports in Iraq, Syria and Egypt did not disrupt the independence of those countries.[3] The Lebanese Parliament approved the treaty but was not ratified by the French government. Paris refused to ratify both treaties due to political changes in France and to a feeling of national security. France was reluctant to abandon her Syro-Lebanese base in the eastern Mediterranean while Europe was witnessing a resurgence

[1] M. B. and H. G. L., "Syria and Lebanon: The States of the Levant under French Mandate", *Bulletin of International News*, Jul. 13, 1940, Vol. 17, No. 14, p. 848. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25642818

[2] Ministry of Defense, Syrian Arab Republic, *Al-muahada al-Faransiya al-Suriya, 1936-1941* [Franco-Syrian Treaty, 1936-1941], [Source: http://www.mod.gov.sy/index.php?node=554&cat=1169#], and Lenczowski, p. 314.

[3] Bchara Khalil Al-Khoury, *Haqaea Lubnaniya* [Lebanese facts] (Beirut: Awarq Lubnaniya, 1960), v. 1, pp. 202-204.

of German and Italian militarism.[1] This French attitude made many Syrians and Lebanese realized eventually that France was an occupying power and that French Parliament like the French Army did not apply its mission as a mandatory power and considered the Levant a colony, and thus France according to them looked at Damascus and Beirut as part of its colonial empire in Africa and Asia.[2]

As for the Nazi involvement in the Levant, the French authorities had noted since the late 1930s with concern the installation of dozens of German agents in the spread of German influence. Equipped with fabricated passports and working undercover as exiled German Jews, tourists, journalists, or archaeologists, the agents who were linked to the *Abwehr* (German Military Intelligence), did not restrict themselves to the collection of information. Various French and British reports highlighted their role in organizing political opposition, smuggling weapons and sabotaging mostly British interests.[3] On the other hand, the Germans sent to Damascus in December Baldur von Schirach, the head of the Nazi youth for a mission relating to consolidating and organizing Arab youth.[4]

On the other hand, on June 23, 1939, France and Turkey concluded a treaty of mutual assistance and an agreement signed in Ankara whereby France would cede to Turkey Hatay (the Sanjak of Alexandretta) which enjoyed an autonomous situation within Syria. It is worth mentioning that Alexandretta has been always considered by the Syrians and Arab nationalists as an integral part

[1] Lenczowski, p. 316.
[2] De Wailly, pp. xiv-xv.
[3] Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 92.
[4] Issac Lipschits, *La politique de la France au Levant, 1939-1941* (Paris: Edition Pedone, 1963), pp. 82-83.

of the Levant. This step was due to the need of France for Turkey's friendship to at a time the international situation had deteriorated and the prestige of the League of Nations was undermined.[1]

All these measures and plans did not avoid neither France nor the world from a catastrophic ordeal that erupted a few days later, it was the breakout of the Second World War.

[1] Majid Khadduri, "The Alexandretta Dispute." *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1945, p. 406. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2193522.

Chapter 2

From Paris to Vichy

On September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland; Britain responded with an ultimatum to Germany to cease military operations, and on September 3, after the ultimatum was ignored, Britain and France declared war on Germany. On August 23, 1939, a nonaggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union was signed which divided eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence. According to this pact, Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland were put into German and Soviet "spheres of influence". In the north, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia were allocated to the Soviet sphere. On September 17, the Red Army invaded the Polish territories assigned to the Soviet Union.

The outbreak of war brought immediate changes in every sphere of life in Syria and Lebanon[1] and reinforced French control in these two states.[2] A State of Emergency was proclaimed by High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux, which took the form of strengthened police activities, enforcing black-out and providing air-raid shelters. German nationals had been detained after the outbreak of hostilities[3] and strict censorship was imposed including a prohibition to listen to German broadcasts from *Radio Berlin-Zeesen*, which with the Italian transmissions (both in Arabic),

[1] A. H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A political essay* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1963), p. 230.
[2] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French mandate: the politics of Arab nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 584.
[3] Gilleo, p. 141.

aimed at weakening France's position and propagating Axis's ideas and shaping public opinion including the trope of the Jews as a shared enemy. In the light of a noticeable fascination for the German success in Poland which was fostered by news and speeches on German radio, gatherings in cafes and public places were banned.[1] Spreading rumors about measures taken by the mandate authorities to obstruct Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca was one of the means used to agitate the public opinion against France. In reaction, the French administration set up a program to counter the effects of such propaganda. Hence, since early November it organized in Damascus a daily screening of news in local cinemas in French and Arabic with reduced prices for students to reach younger audiences, and special arrangements were taken to attract broader populace including the illiterate public. In addition, a series of public conferences was organized to provide a forum for intellectuals potentially supporting the Allies' cause.[2] Moreover, a number of Russian residents were expelled from Beirut and some Syrian cities while the Anglophobe Mufti of Jerusalem Amin Al-Husayni (see photo No. 6 in Appendix 1) removed himself from Beirut to Baghdad on October 16[3] and a number of his supporters were arrested and sentenced for smuggling arms into Palestine.[4]

On the other hand, hoarders and speculators were tried[5] and unconvincing measures were taken to control major industries, stabilize prices and to secure an adequate supply and distribution

[1] Nordbruch, p. 83 and see also Khoury*, Syria and the French mandate,* p. 585.
[2] Nordbruch, p. 84.
[3] The Mufti had previously fled in October 1937 from Jerusalem to Lebanon on account of his activities in stirring up terrorism in Palestine. [Source: Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958, a study in Iraqi politics,* 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 162].
[4] Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate,* pp. 295-296.
[5] Nicola A. Ziadeh, *Syria and Lebanon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), p. 62.

of foodstuffs,[1] while the sale of petrol for private use was temporarily prohibited.[2] The French military got the authority to requisition whatever they needed, while most taxis were confiscated.[3]

After the outbreak of the war, The French mandate authorities in the Levant took various measures to tighten their grip on the political life. In Lebanon, the High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux, dismissed the Chamber and the Ministry suspended the constitution on September 21st, he also ordered the suppression of the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party and its newspaper *Sawt al-Sha'b* صوت الشعب (The Voice of the People) and the arrest of its leaders.[4] Members of the Syrian National Party were detained as probable trouble-makers and for the belief that their activities were in part Nazi inspired and German paid.

In Syria, the governmental crisis which occurred a few months before the war facilitated the intervention of the High Commissioner who imposed in July 1939 a series of measures under the pretext of the stability of local order[5] such as suspension of the constitution, dissolution of the parliament, granting minorities regions more autonomy and placing the government in

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[1] Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate,* p. 294.

[2] Khoury, p. 584.

[3] ibid, p. 584.

[4] The French government has disbanded the French Communist Party and closed down its newspaper *L'Humanité* ; paradoxically *Sawt al-Sahib* continued to publish its issues in Beirut till 25 September 1939 because the Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon backed France at the start of the war and even called its member to volunteer in the French army, eventually this stance did not prevent its members from imprisonment and the closure of its newspaper by the French authorities which had noted with concern the party's statements justifying the occupation of the eastern parts of Poland by the Soviet Union. (See: S. Ayyub, *Al-Hizb Al-Shuyui fi Surya wa Lubnan, 1922-1958* [The Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon, 1922-1958] (Beirut: Dar al-Huriyya, 1959), p. 86 and see also Nordbruch, p. 83.

[5] Nordbruch, p. 83.

the hands of a directorate composed of non-nationalist permanent secretaries of ministries.[1]

Following the break out of the war, the French continued to interfere in the internal affairs of Syria where actions similar to those taken in Lebanon were directed at the Communists and the Syrian National Party alongside the dissolution of the "Arab Club" (*Al-Nadi Al-Arabi* النادي العربي)[2] and the "Arab National Office for Propaganda and Publishing" (*Al-Maktab al-Arabi al-Qawmi li al-diaya wa al-Nashr* المكتب العربي القومي للدعاية والنشر),[3] while sever sentences were passed on politicians already under arrest for misdoings made some months back. The French authorities were however satisfied with limiting activity of the main nationalist parties, the National Bloc[4] and the group of Abdul Rahman Shahbandar.[5]

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[1] Khoury, p. 584.

[2] Founded in Damascus in 1937. Among its principles was the revival of Arab history, the establishment of strong ties between Arabs, the spread of education, the encouragement of national industries, and working on the interest of the Arabs. Its most prominent feature was being pro-German, accordingly French and British intelligence claimed that it was the tool for the German penetration into Syria and that it received financial assistance from Berlin. With the outbreak of World War II, the French mandate authorities banned its activities on charges of conspiring against the government. [Source: *Al-Nadi al-Arabi fi Dimashq* [Arab Club in Damascus], https://syrmh.com].

[3] Founded in Damascus in October 1934 to serve the Arab cause in general and the issue of Syria and Palestine in particular, by means of propaganda, dissemination and education within the framework of broad national goals that transcend regional borders. [Source: *Al-maktab Al-Arabi Al-Qawmi li Al-diaya wa Al-Nashr* [Arab National Office for Propaganda and Publishing], https://www.palestinapedia.net].

[4] National Bloc, Arabic al-Kutlah al-Wataniyyah, a coalition of Syrian nationalist parties that opposed the French mandate and demanded independence, dominating Syrian politics throughout the years of its existence, 1925–49. [Source: "National Bloc", *Britannica,* https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Bloc].

[5]A prominent Syrian nationalist and a leading opponent of compromise with French authority, France considered cooperating with him because of his opposition to the National Bloc and to allegations of his support to Britain and the Hashemites. He was assassinated in Damascus on July 6, 1940. [Source: *Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar al-tabib al mufaker allazi sumiyat bi ismihi al-thawra* [Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar, the

The majority of the leading political figures of the French mandate Levant declared their loyalty to France proclaiming their support for democratic regimes. The dominant feeling among the people was the fear of repeating the terrible experiences of the previous World War, while mistrust of France and Britain prevailed -except for the Francophile group- due to their failure in keeping their promises in Alexandretta after giving it to Turkey and in Palestine with the outbreak of tension between Arabs and Zionists.[1]

During the first months of the war, France assembled in the Levant a large force of "the Army of the Levant" (*L'armée du Levant*)[2] under the command of General Maxime Weygand. It was expected that if war were to extend to the eastern Mediterranean this army would have a major role to play, but the defeat of France in June 1940 put an end to these plans.[3] Ten months after the outbreak of the war Nazi Germany attacked France through Belgium and Luxembourg. (See *Map – 6* in Appendix 4)

The deterioration of the military situation compelled the French government to move first to the city of Tour and then to Bordeaux. Matters became even more perilous eventually with the Italian declaration of war on France and Britain on June 10, 1940.

On June 16 the French government moved to the city of Vichy in central France under the leadership of Marshal Philippe Pétain[4]

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thinker and the doctor whose name was given to a revolution, https://www.aljazeera.net/blogs/2020/8/19].

[1] Lenczowski, pp. 319-319 and Hourani, p. 230.

[2] "The Army of the Levant" refers to the French armed forces garrisoned in the Levant in the interwar period until the Second World War. See: Mehtidis, Alexis. *Armée du Levant-French Army of the Levant 1920-1946-Notes on its organisation and orders-of-battle.* https://www.academia.edu/39200159/Arm%C3%A9e_du_Levant_French_Army_of_the_Levant_1920_1946_Notes_on_its_organisation_and_orders_of_battle.

[3] Lenczowski, p 319.

[4] French general. He served in the French army from 1876 and later taught at the War College. His successful defense in the Battle of Verdun (1916) made him a national hero,

(see photo No. 6 in Appendix 1) and concluded an armistice with the Nazis on June 22. This armistice established a German occupation zone in Northern and Western France that encompassed all English Channel and Atlantic Ocean ports and left the remainder "free" to be governed by the French. (See *Map – 7* in Appendix 4)

The Franco-German armistice was signed on the evening of 22 June, but it would not come into force until the Italians signed their own armistice on 24 June which came into effect early the next morning. This armistice established a small occupation zone (see *Map -7* in Appendix 4) and an Italian Armistice Commission with France (*Commissione Italiana d'Armistizio con la Francia*, *CIAF*) in Turin to oversee French compliance. Armistice commissions were also established for French North Africa and French Somaliland. The Franco-Italian armistice provided for Italian supervision of disarmament and demobilization in the overseas territories either by visits or by permanent armistice commissions, with the promise, however, that such commissions would take into consideration the particular importance of the maintenance of order in the said territories.[1] In fact, only the French Italian convention included an article detailing the respective steps to be taken and the distributions of responsibilities and competencies.[2] The armistice

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and in 1918 he became commander in chief and a marshal of France. After the war he was appointed vice president of the Supreme War Council (1920–30) and Minister of War (1934). After the German invasion of France (1940), Pétain was appointed premier at age 84. He concluded an armistice with Germany, and as head of Vichy France he attempted to obtain concessions by cooperating with the Germans. After the Allied invasion of France, he fled to Germany. In 1945 he was tried and condemned to death; the sentence was commuted to life in prison, where he died at age 95.
[Source: "Philippe Pétain", https://www.britannica.com/summary/Philippe-Petain].

[1] Robert Lewis Melka, *The Axis and the Arab Middle East: 1930-1945* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1976) Diss. Doct. Ph.D. 1966 published on microfilm, p. 156.

[2] Nordbruch, p. 90.

terms with Italy appeared to leave France's position in the Levant appeared virtually untouched,[1] the French Levantine mandates, however, were only dealt with "in passing."[2] The cease-fire went into effect at 00:35 on 25 June 1940, more than two days later, only after another armistice was signed between France and Italy.

The armistice did have some relative advantages for the French compared to worse possible outcomes such as avoiding disarmament and full occupation and keeping both the colonial empire and the Fleet which was to be disarmed but not surrendered. The remaining French state in the unoccupied zone could enforce a certain de facto independence and neutrality vis-à-vis the Axis. Consequently, the conventions of the armistice were meant to regulate France's relations with the Axis and to establish preliminary rules for cooperation and administration of the territories affected by the French defeat.[3]

Some French leaders refused to surrender and fled to London where they formed a French government in exile under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle (see photo No. 1 in Appendix 1) on June 28. This government which was known as "Free France" (*France Libre*) decided to continue the war against Germany in accordance with de Gaulle's appeal in June broadcasted on the BBC in London which called for French resistance. De Gaulle considered that France was not alone and not isolated, she can make common cause with the British Empire and can draw unreservedly on the immense industrial resources of the United

[1] Karen Elizabeth Evans, *The apple of discord: the impact of the Levant on Anglo-French relations during 1943,* PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1990, v. 1, p. 157.
[2] Nordbruch, p. 90
[3] ibid, p. 90.

States.[1] By contrast, the government in France which supported Rome–Berlin Axis and was known as "Vichy France".

In the Levant, the French authorities were in a critical position not only because of the strategic importance of the region but because of the considerable numbers of French troops which were still stationed in Syria and Lebanon. Puaux, the High Commissioner, was determined to guarantee the integrity of the territories entrusted to him; also General Eugene Mittlehauser, who had replaced General Weygand as Commander-in-Chief of the French Army of the Levant (*L'armée du Levant*), announced that his forces would continue the struggle against Germany. Yet despite significant British efforts to encourage this attitude the French authorities in the Levant opted to follow Vichy government. Syria and Lebanon found themselves under Vichy control and most members of the French civil and military administration refused to adhere to General de Gaulle's Free French Committee.

"The acquiescence of the French in the Levant to Vichy was to some considerable extent influenced by traditional distrust of Britain. Suspicions had been aroused by a scheme mooted in June 1940 for an Anglo-French union and it was feared that this might presage a British take-over of the Levant and possible territorial concessions to Turkey. The suspicions which had germinated during the First World War and its aftermath had certainly not perished,"[2] and the French had never succeeded in shaking these suspicions that went back to the 1920's when Britain would have been glad to see her ally Faisal I prevail in Syria in 1920 and consequently the influence of France will be substituted by that of Britain.[3] On the other hand, Britain had been blamed for setting a

[1] Charles de Gaulle, *War memoirs, v. 1, the call to honour, 1940-1942, documents,* translated by Jonathan Griffin (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), pp. 11-12.
[2] Evans, v. 1, p. 43.
[3] Lenczowski, p 319.

dangerous precedent by her treaty with Iraq in 1930 which greatly emboldened Syrian nationalists.[1]

With this new geopolitical situation in the Levant, the Germans could theoretically advance in four directions: Toward Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt and the Gulf threatening the Allies in navigating through the Suez Canal and in reaching the oil resources in Northern Iraq and in Abadan in southwest Iran. On the other hand, a pro-Nazi Levant would deprive the British forces in Palestine to communicate with the "neutral Turkey" since the road between them via Transjordan and Iraq was long and arduous. (See *Map – 8* in Appendix 4)

In the Levant the capitulation of France had remarkable feedback from the public. Many Christians in Mount Lebanon expressed their grief and sorrow[2] and prayed for the safety of France, while in Damascus the feeling of mourning was evident.[3] On the other hand, some Muslims in Beirut showed their happiness and set up festivals and decorations in the Muslim quarter of Basta,[4] while a delegation of the Lebanese Jewish community leaders petitioned Puaux not to apply the Vichy legislation concerning the Jews, but Puaux himself was not an enthusiastic supporter of the Vichy regime, so the lack of implementation of anti-Jewish laws did not pose a problem.[5] Some Syrians revealed their joy to see the decline of the ascendancy of France which overpowered them for around 20 years.[6] Many Syrian and Lebanese politicians realized that the French cannot be the masters of the East since the Germans occupy

[1] ibid, p. 319.
[2] Riyashi, p. 231.
[3] De Wailly, p. 9.
[4] Riyashi, p. 231.
[5] Kristen E. Schulze, *The Jews of Lebanon between coexistence and conflict,* 2nd revised edition (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), pp. 59-60.
[6] Najib al-Armanazi, *Muhadarat an Surya min al-ihtilal hatta al-jalaa* [Lectures on Syria from occupation till evacuation] (Cairo: Arab League, 1953), p. 119.

their country[1] while many people regarded the occupation of Paris by the Germans will lead to the emancipation of Syria and Lebanon from the French mandate.[2]

From the capitulation of France in the Levant in June 1940 till the winter of 1941 Germany showed indifference and disinterest toward this region. Several events took place there which could have tempted the Germans to intervene, and yet they remained apathetic.

These events started on June 30, 1940, when the borders between Palestine and the Levant states were closed from both sides.[3] On July 1, the British Foreign Office issued a statement[4] in which it warned the French authorities in the Levant against any attempt to undermine the interests of Britain and the countries she pledged to defend in the Middle East. It was reported that a similar statement was indeed followed by Turkey since all the neighboring countries for different reasons had an interest in the future of the Levant states.[5] After the fall of France, an Anglo-Vichy dispute arose and its repercussions were reflected in the Levant. Britain had been assured that the French fleet would not fall into German hands, but Vichy's promises meant very little and had no guarantee of its neutralization, and hence, the fate of the fleet continued to preoccupy the British. Consequently, on July 3, the British Royal Navy attacked the French Fleet at *Al-Marsa Al-Kabir* in Oran, Algeria and three ships were destroyed with the loss of almost 1,300 Frenchmen.[6] Two days later the Vichy government broke

[1] Riyashi, p. 231.
[2] ibid, p. 233.
[3] George Kirk, *The Middle East in the war, survey of international affairs, 1939-1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 82.
[4] Text in *The Times*, July 2, 1940.
[5] M. B. and H. G. L., p.851.
[6] Evans, v. 1, p. 43. (the exact number of French causalities was 1297).

diplomatic relations with London.[1] This had an immediate impact in the Levant which appeared in the suspension of the negotiations for the exchange of three British merchant ships detained in Beirut port for a French liner anchored in Haifa, and subsequently, 50 of the crew of these British ships were detained by Vichy authorities for several weeks. Britain reacted against this humiliation by ordering the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) to cease pumping crude oil from Kirkuk (northern Iraq) to the refinery in Tripoli (Lebanon). In August the Vichy authorities in the Levant forbade the British subjects capable of military service to leave Syria and Lebanon and compelled the British consul to move from Beirut and reside in the mountain city of Aley[2] so that he would be unable directly to observe or influence the course of events in the capital.[3] Moreover; German and Italian internees were released, their properties were released from confiscation, and the Banco di Roma resumed its work.[4]

These developments had no echo in Berlin. In fact, the Germans revealed their disinterest during that period in the Arab World which according to their point of view would be left to Italy. Among Italy's ambitions was replacing France in the Levant, and this was expressed in a memorandum on the armistice conditions desired by Italy issued by Galeazzo Ciano the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs on June 18 when the French resistance was crumbling. In this memorandum, Ciano demanded the neutralization of Beirut and obtaining authority to occupy it. But "the Italian leaders had to reckon not only with French opposition but also with the fact that nowhere in the Arab World was Italy

[1] Longrigg, p. 297.

[2] Lipschits, p.58.

[3] During that period Belgium and Norway were under German occupation, Poland was portioned between the Soviet Union and the Nazis while the Czechs were the subjects of the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

[4] Kirk, p. 84.

more despised than in the French Levant."[1] On the other hand, the moderation presented by Italy in the matters of armistice conditions did not mean that its leaders had given up their dream of substituting Italian influence for French and British in the Levant.[2] In late June Mufti of Jerusalem Amin Al-Husayni who settled in Baghdad established contacts with the German ambassador in Ankara, Franz von Papen, to consult with the Germans about the future of the Arab Countries, but the outcome of this mission was no immediate success, while von Papen expressed sympathies with the Arab cause, he emphasized Italian priority in questions related to the Eastern Mediterranean.[3] Moreover; on July 5 von Papen told Naji Shawkat the Iraqi Minister of Justice that: "the future of the political situation of the Near East [is] a matter of interest primarily to Italy and [I] could be regarded only as an intermediary for proposals and wishes addressed to Italy via the Reich."[4] Shawkat expressed the Arabs' distrust of Italy and their determination to liberate their countries from Western imperialism,[5] and revealed the Arabs' intention to solicit an independence declaration from the Axis power.[6] In spite of this, most of the Arab nationalists were anti-Italians and Germanophiles, and thus they looked toward Germany to realize their national aspirations. Accordingly, Mufti Al-Husayni's private secretary, Uthman Kamal Haddad[7], travelled to Berlin in August and September upon an agreement between the then Iraqi prime minister, Rashid Aali Al-Kilani (see photo No. 6 in Appendix 1),

[1] Melka, p. 155.
[2] ibid, pp. 156-157.
[3] Nordbruch, p. 94.
[4] *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945,* Series D, 1937-1945, v. X, No. 125 (London: HMSO, 1949-1964), pp. 141-142 (hereafter cited as *DGFP*).
[5] Basheer M. Nafi, "The Arabs and the Axis, 1933-1940", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Spring 1997, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 14.
[6] *DGFP*, Series D, v. X, No. 124, pp. 142-144.
[7] Haddad was a young Arab activist from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli.

and the Mufti[1] with an Iraqi passport provided by Al-Kilani under the name "Tawfiq Ali Aal Shaker,"[2] where he held a number of talks in Berlin with German diplomats and politicians at the Foreign Office including Ernst von Weizsäcker the minister of Foreign Affairs. The focal point of Haddad's talks in Germany was to obtain an Axis declaration in line with the Arab aspirations which he outlined as follows: 1. Recognition of the independence of the Arab countries particularly those under French and British control, 2. Recognition of the Arabs' right to unite their countries, 3. Recognition of the Arabs' right to solve the Jewish problem in Palestine in a manner that conforms to the national interest of the Arabs, 4. An assertion to the effect that the Axis powers had no imperialist designs with respect to Egypt and the Sudan.[3]

Meanwhile, Germany focused its attention at that period on Britain. Hitler announced on July 16: "I have decided to prepare a landing operation against England."[4] Already On June 30 General Alfred Jodl, the head of the operations staff of the OKW (*Oberkommande der Wehrmacht* – High Command of the Armed Forces) prepared plans to defeat Britain.[5]

While the Germans were preparing for the battle of Britain, they issued a memorandum on July 21 expressing their political *désintéressement* in the Arab World which should be left to Italy, but they did not renounce economic interests relevant to the question of air routes and to the Iraqi oil without any mention of the Levant. The memorandum reads: "There can be no doubt that we [Germans] must give Italy absolute precedence in organizing

[1] Nafi, p. 15.
[2] Uthman Kamal Haddad, *Harakat Rashid Aali Al-Kilani sanat 1941* [The movement of Rashid Aali Al-Kilani 1941] (Sidon: Al-Maktaba Al-Asriya, 1950), p. 24.
[3] *DGFP*, Series D, v. X, No. 403, pp. 559-560.
[4] ibid*,* Series D, v. X, No. 177, p. 226.
[5] Geoffrey Warner, *Iraq and Syria, 1941* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1974), p. 41.

the Arabian area, a fact that has already found indirect expression in the delimitation of the demobilization zones for the French Army on the basis of the armistice treaties. This consequently rules out any German claim to the leadership in the Arabian area or a division of the claim with Italy. This political *désintéressement* should not be taken to signify that we renounce any economic interest in that area in which connection two questions namely the question of air routes and that of the Iraqi oil come to the fore. We shall be able to achieve the solution of these two questions in concert with Italy while energetically protect our own interests."[1]

The Nazis directed their efforts during that period also toward Eastern Europe. At a military conference on July 31 Hitler "reaffirmed and expanded the existing orders to prepare for an invasion of Britain and simultaneously announced his decision to deal with the Soviet Union by the spring of 1941."[2] Consequently, the *Luftwaffe* (German Air force) started the battle of Britain on August 12, and on the 24th of that month, London was heavily bombarded for the first time.

While the Nazis were involved in their aerial offensive against Britain, they ignored the Arab calls, and again they issued on August 20 a secret circular stating that Germany would let Italy take the lead in the political reorganization of the Arab World since Germany had only economic and cultural interests in the area. The circular emphasized that those German intentions must not be known to the Arabs. According to this circular "Germany pursues no political interests in the Mediterranean area whose southern and eastern part is formed by the Arab World. Germany will let Italy take the lead in the political reorganization of the Arab area. This consequently rules out any German claim to

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. X, No. 200, p. 261.
[2] Warner, p. 58.

political leadership or the sharing of leadership with Italy in the Arab territories which consist of the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria-Lebanon and Iraq.

This political *désintéressement* does not at all mean that in these areas Germany renounces the pursuit of interests in matters of economy, transportation and cultural policy. First and foremost, Germany will assert and settle in concert with Italy her claims with respect to participation in the exploitation of oil resources, securing her air routes and the continuation of her archaeological activities. These must be treated confidentially and must not be made known to Arab personalities. On no account Arabs [know] about a *désintéressement* on the part of Germany.[1]

In accordance with the cooperation between Berlin and Rome, the Italian and German Armistice Commissions arrived in Beirut during the summer of 1940 "to supervise the execution of the armistice and to ensure that Axis internees were released, the French forces reduced to the minimum necessary for maintaining internal security and stocks of war material immobilized or disposed of."[2] In addition to some 50 Italian officials, the Commission included several local agents and a handful of German officials.[3]

Iskandar Riyashi, a Lebanese journalist who witnessed this period, mentioned in his book[4] that religious and communal schisms were reflected in the attitude of the politicians in Beirut towards these two commissions whereby many Christian politicians visited the Italian commission at its venue at *Hotel Normandy* (see picture *P-3* in Appendix 2) in Zaytuni area, while Muslims politicians visited

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. X, No. 370, pp. 515-516.
[2] Kirk, pp. 84-85.
[3] Nordbruch, p. 90.
[4] *Qabl wa Baad wa Ruasa Lubnan kama araftahum* [Before and after and Lebanese presidents as I knew them], p. 257.

the German commission[1] at *Hotel Métropole*[2] (see picture *P-2* in Appendix 2) located near the port.[3]

Nevertheless, the arrival of the Italian Commission raised concerns to Puaux about the immediate Italian access to the Levant. Since their advent, members of this Commission started creating troubles for the Vichy administration by improving Italy's standing with the local public though some of this public had doubts about the goals of the Italian presence mainly after Italy invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia) between 3 October 1935 – 19 February 1937 and occupied Albania in April 1939.

In addition to a statement in favor of Arab independence, Italian officials established in the Levant contacts with several public personalities to promote Italian interests in Syria and Lebanon. A Free French report revealed close links with members of the Maronite community including the archbishops Abdullah Khoury and Ignatius Mubarak besides the Supreme Council of the dominant Christian "*Kataeb"* party (Phalanges). On the other hand, the Commission tended to present Italy as a guarantor of an independent Christian Lebanon, but strong protests by the French government against these activities led to slowing down the Italian

[1] According to Riyashi (p.259) this harmony between the Muslims and the Germans was due to high Muslim respect towards Germany, they never forgot that this country, since it was empire, supported the Muslim Ottoman Empire in its wars with Russia and stood by the Muslims in their international causes. Another momentum for this harmony was the German Emperor's visit to Istanbul and other parts of the Ottoman Empire especially Syria and Lebanon, and when he left Beirut he was granted the title "Hajj Guillaume" by some Beiruti notables working at the port as a gratitude for his friendship with Muslims and his visits to some mosques.

[2] Also known as *Hotel Allemand* and then as *Deutscher Hof* or 'German Inn' and was run by the German "Blaich" and "Unger" families. Probably as a consequence of the German defeat in World War I, the later owner Jakob Unger changed its name from *Allemand* to *Métropole.* [Source: Goethe Institute [Beirut], *Traces of Germany in Lebanon. Everything is so clean it gleams and sparkles. German-run hotels and restaurants in Lebanon,* https://www.goethe.de/ins/lb/en/kul/sup/spu/20950334.html]

[3] Riyashi, p. 257.

endeavor.[1] Furthermore; Riyashi mentioned in his book[2] that some news had circulated about several contacts between Émile Edde[3] and the Italian Commission in which the latter suggested to offer cooperation in case Italy would replace France in Lebanon. Edde responded that in case France leaves Lebanon he would like to have an independent Lebanon even from the Arab World and free of any mandate or colonialism, and this should be assured by an international guarantee, preferably Italian and not German because the Christians of Lebanon do not accept any German influence or protection in their country. The Italian commission met also with the Lebanese Christian politician Beshara Al-Khoury but the latter responded in a keen diplomatic manner avoiding any reply that would bear tension with France or Germany.

As the Italians encountered problems in their rapprochement with the Maronites, they turned toward the Muslims. Openly announcing Italy's desire to take over the mandates from France, Italian officials assured some Muslim figures of Rome's intention to improve the economic situation and to work for a unified Arab state under a Muslim leader. In order to bolster their plans, the Italians sought to buy the voice of local newspapers, but these attempts did nothing to realize the Italian intentions and did not reflect a positive echo from the Arab side. Another more successful channel pursued by the Italian Armistice Commission though tended to counter the German influence that prevailed amongst Arab nationalists in the Levant, and that was convincing leading Arab nationalist personalities to coordinate their nationalistic policies in close relations with Italy.[4]

[1] Nordbruch, pp. 90-91.
[2] p. 254.
[3] He was the president of Lebanon from 1936 till 1941.
[4] Nordbruch, p. 91.

While the Germans were highly interested in the prospect of an anti-British Arab revolt and more concerned about the Italian policy, they appeared willing to accommodate the Arab demands.[1] It was not until October 21 that the Axis powers finalized a common declaration in which they support the full independence of the Arab countries.[2] The declaration was broadcast from Rome and Berlin radios on October 23, but was not published in the Axis print media till December when the Axis powers grew more interested in taking some steps in the Arab countries.[3] But the declaration was received with disappointment in the Arab side where it was seen as inadequate for clarifying the ambiguity of the Axis powers' position on the Arab question.[4]

With the arrival of the Italian Commission, Britain expressed strong objection to any Axis led occupation or any military use of the Levantine territories.[5] In spite of official disclaimers of the aim of the Commission, it was generally believed by the British government that the Commission's goal would be a preparation for the occupation of Syria and Lebanon by the Axis.[6] Accordingly, the British determined to do all they could do to recover the influence of their French allies in the Levant. Winston Churchill (see photo No. 2 in Appendix 1), the British prime minister, discussed in London on September 19 important issues pertaining to the Levant with General Georges Catroux (see photo No. 3 in Appendix 1) the Governor General of French Indochina who chose to join de Gaulle and was aware of the latter June appeal,

[1] Nafi, p. 16.
[2] Salah Al-Aqqad, *Al-Arab wa al-harb al-alamiya al-thaniya* [The Arabs and the Second World War] (Cairo: The Arab League, 1966), p. 64.
[3] Lukasz Hirszowicz, *The third Reich and the Arab East* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 92.
[4] Nafi, p. 16
[5] Nordbruch, p. 90.
[6] Hourani, p. 232.

moreover; Catroux had a lot of experience in Islamic affairs and was a former Governor of the State of Damascus in 1920, and hence he seemed eligible to follow up the Free French interests in the Levant.[1] Churchill informed Catroux that there have been new developments in favor of resuming the fight against the Axis. These developments were based on the rally of some African colonies[2] around de Gaulle and on the repercussions of the Italian Commission's arrival in Beirut. It was absolutely necessary to Churchill that a French personality would come to the Middle East to take over this mission. Churchill considered Catroux the most qualified and eligible person to hold this position to implement the mission.

The plan according to Miles Lampson, the British Ambassador in Cairo, would be ready for execution about the end of September and would involve a revolt or a coup by pro-Free French elements in the French mandate Levant, arrest of the Italian Commission, and finally make an appeal to Catroux who would be waiting with Free French forces in Palestine. Catroux would not go there as a representative of de Gaulle, but he could declare that later. The Free French military commanders welcomed this idea and insisted that its implementation would be the responsibility of the Free French forces unless Italy attempted to intervene, in this case, British naval and air support would be available.[3] Although de Gaulle protested about the way he had been ignored in Catroux's appointment, he readily agreed to his mission.[4] The British chiefs of staff welcomed the idea of spontaneous coup by the Free French

[1] A. B. Gaunson, *The Anglo-French clash in Lebanon and Syria, 1940-45* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 14.

[2] These colonies were: Chad, French Cameroon, Gabon, French Congo and French Central Africa (Ubangi-Shari).

[3] Georges Catroux, *Dans la bataille de Mediterranée: Egypte, Levant, Afrique du Nord, 1940-1944* (Paris: Julliard, 1949), pp. 32-33.

[4] De Gaulle, v. 1, p. 108.

but thought it would be a mistake to offer too much encouragement because if it failed it might cause the Vichy French to become actively hostile, moreover; this might trigger Syrian native rising and there were no British forces to spare for any commitments in the Levant.[1]

Hence, General Catroux travelled in disguise to Cairo to monitor the situation and to seize any advantage that might offer itself; but, by the time he arrived in Cairo, the plan had already been foiled[2] due to the imprudence of the French[3] who revealed and disclosed the whole plan, and thus Catroux-Churchill project was not achieved. In the aftermath, the Vichy Government moved quickly to suppress this tendency and to strengthen its grip. Suspects were arrested and repatriated, waverers relieved of office and only pro-Vichy retained key positions.[4]

Following this failure, the Allies imposed in November an economic blockade was imposed by the Allies in the Levant, in the hope of creating dissatisfaction with the Vichy authorities.

While the British, the Free French, the Vichy French, and the Italian were reacting in the Levant, Germany was steering towards another part of the world, this time to the Far East. The Nazis concluded a pact with Italy and Japan on September 27. According to this pact: "Japan recognizes and respects the leadership of Germany and Italy in establishing a new order in Europe, [while] Germany and Italy recognize and respect the leadership of Japan in the establishment of a new order in Greater East Asia."[5]

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[1] S. O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, v. II, the Germans come to help their Ally, 1941* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1956), p. 199.
[2] Evans, v. 1, p. 45
[3] Lipschits, p. 63.
[4] Gaunson, p. 14.
[5] *Documents of German history*, edited by Louis L. Snyder (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Ruggers University Press, 1953), p. 459.

This Nazi demarche in the Far East synchronized with a ferocious offensive in Europe revealed in fierce German air raids against Britain mainly on London causing heavy losses in lives and properties. By the end of the summer, it was clear that the German air force (*Luftwaffe*) was not able to control the skies of the English Channel and southeast England and that made the Nazis abandon the idea of invading the British Isles.

Alternative plans were proposed to undermine the power of Britain by blocking its sea routes at the Suez Canal and Gibraltar to deprive her of reaching India and the oilfields in the Arab Gulf. Among the advocates of these plans was Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, the commander-in-chief of the German navy. According to him, The British have always considered the Mediterranean the pivot of their world empire. For this reason, the Mediterranean question must be cleared up during the winter months, Gibraltar and the Suez Canal must be taken, and an advance from Suez through Palestine and Syria as far as Turkey is necessary.[1] The same opinion was shared by the High Command of the Land Forces which proposed an advance on the Suez Canal from the north through Bulgaria, Turkey and Syria.[2] But Franz von Papen, the German Ambassador in Ankara, mentioned in his memoirs that he dissuaded Hitler and the military command from invading Turkey due to the topography of Anatolia and a possible encountering a Turkish stiff resistance besides problems in logistics and transportation.[3]

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[1] Howard Sachar, *Europe leaves the Middle East, 1936-1954* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), pp. 140-141.

[2] Hirszowicz, p. 95.

[3] Franz von Papen, *von Papen Yatakalam* [Von Papen speaks], translated by Najati Sidqi (Beirut: Dar Beirut, 1952), p. 39.

Chapter 3

Nazi agents in the Levant: Roser and von Hentig

Despite the Germans' engagement in Europe and their indifference toward the Arab demands, they did not disregard completely the events in the Middle East and the Arab World. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Hitler asked the *Abwehr* (German Military Intelligence) to establish a network or agents to be sent to the Middle East. To avoid being seized, newspapers, books and propaganda films were sent to the Levant by diplomatic pouch. In the domain of archeology, German archeologists played a major role in this domain.[1] During the summer of 1940, the Nazis made a revision to their policy towards the Arab World including the Levant. [2] With this new strategy, Syria and Lebanon were an arena for spreading German propaganda and collecting information useful for the interests of the government of Berlin, and this was implement through sending Nazi agents to the area to intermingle with the natives and send back reports to the German government.

Accordingly, the German Foreign Ministry suggested sending a German personality to the Levant along with the Italian Armistice Commission and thus in the late summer of 1940 Rudolf Roser, an *Oberleutnant* (senior lieutenant) in the *Abwehr*, arrived in Beirut and joined the Italian Armistice Commission as a German observer.

[1] De Wailly, p.69.
[2] Melka, p. 174.

Roser had formerly represented the *Voigtländer* optical firm in Beirut for two years, and this enabled him to acquire good knowledge and experience in the Levant. While working with the Italian Armistice Commission, Roser established his headquarters at *Hotel Métropole*[1] in Beirut which became the center of his activities and turned it into a major hub of pro-German propaganda and networking. Yet Roser's activities were not limited to propaganda but aimed at coordinating with Arab nationalists and establishing close contacts with paid informants who provided him with detailed information about the political developments[2] to build an infrastructure which could be useful in case of a revolt.[3]

Among Roser's activities as well were reaching former Syrian and Lebanese officers served in the Ottoman army who provided him with access to local Muslim figures. This network enabled Germany by 1941 to establish contacts with more influential personalities in the Levant.[4] Moreover; Roser had colleagues and collaborators, among them Paula Koch who spoke Arabic and French and made Aleppo the center of her activities since her family had been in business there for some fifty years. Levantine personalities were also involved with the mission of Roser, among them Najib Kenaan a Damascene dentist trained in Germany who was the principal assistant of Paula Koch. Another personality was Saadi Al-Kilani alias the *Shami Pir* (Syrian Sheikh) a kinsman of the ex-Queen Surayyah of Afghanistan and caused troubles on the North-West frontiers of India in 1938. He was married to a German woman and whose farm in the Ghuta area near Damascus was said to be a center of German activity allegedly equipped with

[1] According to Riayshi's book p. 251, this hotel retained its German name: *Deutsher Hof* after the German victory in France and this name was posted whenever the Germans succeed in war or politics.
[2] Nordbruch, p. 92.
[3] Lipschits, p. 83.
[4] Nordbruch, p. 92.

a radio transmitter. In Beirut there was the Journalist Rashad Barbir who became the correspondent of the German Journal *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*. Gradually military officers began to arrive, and in October Major von Prat and three other military personalities were reported to have made a reconnaissance of the Iraqi frontiers and in December activities of this kind multiplied in all directions including Palestine.[1]

Roser recommended in a report he submitted on November 18 that the demobilization of the French forces in the Levant be stopped, as the British were threatening from Palestine; and that Puaux be removed "if possible in the next 48 hours"; according to Roser, High Commissioner Puaux and his group are open to British influence.[2] Six days after Roser's report the High Commissioner was dismissed[3] on the pretext of his unsatisfactory as found by Vichy; his replacement, Jean Chiappe, was shot down en route to Beirut by the Italians,[4] and he was succeeded on December 6 by General Henri Dentz[5] (see photos No. 4 & 5 in Appendix 1), another loyal supporter to Vichy and Pétain.

Within the next ten days, Roser submitted another report in which he claimed that 70-80% of the French in the Levant are Gaullists and the British were stirring up the Druzes and the Kurds. Roser added that there was a widespread rumor that Germany had sold out the Levant to the hated Italians and the Arabs were willing to

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[1] Kirk, p. 87

[2] Melka, p. 177.

[3] ibid, p. 177.

[4] His plane was shot down near Sardinia on his way to Beirut on November 27, 1940, by Italian air force mistaking his plane for a British one.

[5] A general in the French Army who served with the Vichy French Army after France surrendered during the Second World War. He was tried as a collaborator after the war. In January 1945, Dentz was sentenced to death for aiding the Axis powers. But Charles de Gaulle, the President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. However, Dentz was not to serve much of this sentence. On 13 December 1945, he died in Fresnes, Val-de-Marne, France.

accept British rule especially after the Italian failure in Greece. As a result, Roser concluded that Syria and Lebanon might soon be faced with a British invasion assisted by a Gaullist Arab revolt.[1] To forestall these threatening events, Roser proposed that:

1- An official German Armistice Commission representative be sent to the Levant.
2- The French should be asked to expel the British consuls in Beirut and Damascus.
3- Puaux's dismissal should be followed by the removal of unreliable French personnel.
4- A regular postal service mainly for German publications should be established to the Levant via Turkey
5- Dispatching to the Levant a German press representative
6- German representatives should coordinate common policies concerning the French Levant with the Italians.[2]

The German Foreign Ministry in late 1940 was becoming aware that in the French Levant the policy of the Italians had unsuccessful results manifested in the mounting criticism of the Italian Armistice Commission amongst the Syrian and Lebanese public. Along with this criticism, the Allies had imposed in November an economic blockade in the Levant, in the hope of creating dissatisfaction with the Vichy authorities.[3] Later, the *OKW* (High Command of the Armed Forces) and the German ambassador in Paris Otto Abetz both reported on December 3 and 4 that the recent loss of prestige suffered by Italy in the Levant as a consequence of her military fiascos was augmenting the danger of a British-Gaullist-Turkish attack. Furthermore, on December 5 Turkey reported a statement by the Iraqi ambassador in Ankara in which he asked the Germans for more German Arabic propaganda

[1] Melka, pp. 177-178.
[2] ibid, p. 178.
[3] Evans, v.1, p.45.

and warned that British efforts in this field were enjoying considerable success, especially in Syria.[1]

These reports were the basis for proposals presented on December 9 by Wilhelm Melchers (the *Legationsrat* [legation counselor] of the Near East Department in the German Foreign Ministry) to Ernst von Weizsäcker, the minister of Foreign Affairs. These proposals were:

1- A written declaration in which the Arabs are assured political freedom and self-determination.
2- Dispatching a German Armistice delegation to Syria with suitable military diplomatic personnel and persons acquainted with the area.
3- This delegation must collaborate with the Italian delegation and with the Dentz, the new High Commissioner, in paralyzing at once British and de Gaullist activities and getting rid of the unreliable officials of the current High Commissioner.
4- Since a reversion to prewar constitution did not seem feasible in Syria, a committee must be formed of Arab nationalists which would take place of the former Syrian government but could then also become the first exponent of the establishment of an independent Greater Syrian state to include Palestine and parts of Transjordan along with abolition of the League of Nations mandate.[2]

Back in September, Melchers suggested sending to the Levant Werner Otto von Hentig who was the head of the Near Eastern Division of the German Foreign Ministry and had the status of minister plenipotentiary as a German Armistice Commission to secure the release of Germans and pro-German Arabs from French

[1] Melka, p. 179.
[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XI, No. 481, pp. 829-829.

detention besides gathering information as a preliminary step to formulate German policy towards the Arabs.[1] In October von Hentig left for Turkey to get from there a visa to enter the Levant.

Unlike the case of Roser, Vichy French were unwilling to see this German Middle East specialist (von Hentig) in their Levantine territories and refused to accept him as a representative of the German Armistice Commission. The strong aversion of Vichy to von Henting was apparently based on what its officials knew about his activities during the First World when he participated in a German mission to raise the population of Afghanistan against the British which gave him the reputation of the German leading trouble-maker in the Middle East. But due to German pressure, the Vichy French finally "swallowed their misgivings" and granted him a visa.

On January 8, 1941 Melchers informed von Hentig that he could proceed to Syria and Lebanon and passed on the following instructions:

1- To report on the political and military situation in Syria and so far as possible the neighboring areas. [He had to find answers to the following questions]: Does Britain constitute a serious threat to Syria by way of Palestine? Are the resources of France adequate for defense? What progress is being made by the movement of de Gaulle? What are the methods with which British propaganda is operating and what success does it have?
2- To gather relevant data for German policy toward the Arab states.
3- To observe Germany's own interests of an economic and cultural nature and to report on them.[1]

[1] Melka, pp. 179-180.

Also, von Hentig was ordered to "avoid everything which could be interpreted as approval or support to any tendencies directed against the French government".[2]

Prior to the German intention to delegate von Hentig to Beirut, the latter put on July 1, 1940 an extensive analysis of the situation in the Arab World following the defeat of France with concrete suggestions for a German strategy in the region till the victory of the Axis is achieved. He started his analysis by emphasizing the strategic importance of the region for Germany's future central African colonial empire. According to him Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya would remain under some sort of French, Spanish and Italian rule with larger autonomy. Egypt would be freed from British rule and granted independence along with sovereignty over Sudan. In Palestine, he recommended that Jewish immigration be ended and that Jews be given minority rights there. This recommendation should be supplemented by efforts to find other areas in the world to be assigned for the immigration of the Jews. As for Iraq and the Levant he argued that it would be a mistake for Germany to support any form of Italian rule because Arab hatred of Italy would jeopardize Germany's economic and political interests mainly in the oil resources of Iraq. Finally, he concluded his recommendation with a determined plea for immediate and direct German involvement in the Arab World.

In the summer of 1940 von Hentig's proposals appear to have been ignored by his superiors in the German Foreign Ministry and by Hitler's inner circle.[3]

Roser's connections were an effective starting point for von Hentig's mission in establishing contacts with Syrian and Lebanese

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[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XI, No. 626, p. 1054.

[2] ibid, p. 1054.

[3] Nicosia, p. 140.

Arab leaders, so following the latter arrival in Beirut on 11 January 1941[1] and Damascus on 25 January,[2] he did not keep his presence secret nor did he avoid meeting with local personalities although he "had denied that he did anything to foment disturbances."[3] At *Hotel Métropole* in Beirut, he discussed the current situation in a series of gatherings with political and nationalist figures[4] such as: Omar Dauq, Ahmad Dauq, Muhammad Ali Bayhum, Adil Arsalan, Majid Arsalan and the eminent Lebanese politician Riyad al-Sulh.[5] Von Hentig told Riyad al-Sulh in an answer to the latter's question about Germany's Arab policy: "A government frequently, because of certain political considerations, must accept an attitude which temporarily diverges from the unalterable national policy. The 'policy of the German People' however was to fight with the Arab lands to win and secure their independence. This attitude of ours would survive all the opinions and measures of any government. Von Henting added that Riyad al-Sulh at once understood him."[6]

Among the visitors of von Hentig at *Hotel Métropole* were Muslim Lebanese leaders who preferred to meet him secretly while swearing their allegiance to the Fuhrer. Another group of visitors were Maronite politicians and clergy known for their support to France and Britain, but again during their visit they declared their loyalty to Hitler.[7]

Von Hentig also met with representatives of the Palestine Arabs and received visits from delegations of nearly all the ethnic and

[1] Nordbruch, p. 95.
[2] Warner, p. 73.
[3] Melka, p. 183.
[4] Riyashi, p. 251
[5] Nordbruch, p. 96.
[6] Werner Otto von Hentig. *Mein Leben: Eine Dienstreise* [My life, a business trip] (Goettingen: Hamish Hamilton, 1948), pp. 339-340 [This English translation is quoted from: Melka, p. 184].
[7] Riyashi, p. 252.

religious groups including a delegation of Palestine Jews who offered their cooperation "if Hitler would guarantee them their own Jewish state in Palestine" and who Hentig had to greatly disabuse.[1]

Von Hentig also made a great impression on the nationalist student youth in particular members of the *Najjadah*[2] party and the Christian "*Kataeb"* (Phalanges) party[3] in addition to suggested exchanges and cooperation with the Iraqi youth formation *"Al-Futuwwa"*. The aim of contacting the youth was to highlight the importance of paramilitary formations and to draw attention to German youth organizations as an important factor for Germany's strength in the war.[4] While he called on the participants to unite their ranks in order to achieve independence and Arab unity he was eager to listen to their demands. Moreover; he made a tour with Roser in the Levant visiting Tripoli, Latakia, Aleppo, Damascus and Eastern Syria where they met local notables and showed German propaganda films. He told them that the German Army was absolutely invincible and be occupying Syria in two or three months.[5] On the other hand, von Hentig disregarded the part of his mission that ordered him to avoid anti-French activities. He showed the film *Sieg im Westen* (Victory in the West)[6] at *Hotel Métropole* in which the German victory and the French defeat were displayed clearly.

Furthermore; he interfered in the political situation of the Levant and announced that German victory was certain and promised the

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[1] ibid, pp.338-339 [This English translation is quoted from: Melka, p. 185].

[2] A Lebanese Arab nationalist political party that appeared in Lebanon during the 1930s, it was officially secular but had mainly Sunni Muslim members.

[3] De Wailly, pp. 55-56.

[4] Nordbruch, p. 97.

[5] John Bagot Glubb, *The story of the Arab Legion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Education, 1948), p. 256.

[6] Lipschits, p. 83

Syrians and the Lebanese that this victory will lead to their full independence.[1] In addition, von Hentig was reported to have supported the views which called for the formation of an Arab Empire and evoked the Palestine question and incited the public against the British accusing them of playing a negative role in this dispute.[2] He also claimed that the British had promised the Turks to give them northern Syria in return for friendship.[3]

In Lebanon, von Hentig had to refute the allegation of the Italian Armistice Commission which received at *Hotel Normandy* monks from monasteries in Mount Lebanon who expressed their support to Italy because they regarded Rome as the capital of Christianity and Catholicism, and also because they viewed victorious Italy as the protector of the Christians in the orient as was France.[4]

What made von Hentig's mission easier was the fact that he was able to travel freely in the area besides the conviction of the Arab nationalists in the Levant that they bear similar interests with those of Nazi Germany mainly in their view toward France, Britain and the Zionist Jews, and many of these nationalists believed that the Reich would realize their desire and aspiration for independence. These factors facilitated the principal purpose of his mission in collecting information to such a degree that during his stay in the Levant he was able to gather more intelligence than had the more than 50 members of the Italian Armistice Commission.[5]

These German activities in the Levant heightened French concerns mainly as von Hentig pushed Dentz to restore some of the self-governing authority that the Arab nationalists possessed before the

[1] Catroux, p. 104.
[2] Kirk, p. 88.
[3] ibid, p. 88.
[4] Riyashi, pp. 252-253.
[5] Von Hentig. P341. [This English translation is quoted from: Melka, p. 186].

war,[1] particularly that von Hentig's sympathies lay with the nationalist whose interests he saw coincided with those of Germany.[2] On the other hand, the British watched these Nazi activities with concern and anxiety. On February 1, 1941 the British Consul-General in Damascus sent the following telegram to the Foreign Office in London:

"1- Von Hentig and Roser arrived in Damascus on January 28 and left for Aleppo via Homs probably to Palmyra and Deir Ezzur on January 30.

2- Ostensible reason for the visit was commercial, but it seems certain the aim was also: a- to inform Berlin about the general situation and about the Anglo-French relation, b- To contact the nationalists, c- to start anti-British propaganda campaign.

3- They met Shukri Al-Quwatli[3] and other nationalists. They also met Syrians with German wives and other known Germanophils. They saw much of the members of the Italian Disarmament Commission, including the Italian consul here.

4- French authorities watched them closely.

5- Syrians are excited over the visit, and German cause has been advanced."[4]

The Vichy French were displeased with that German infiltration which undermined the integrity of the French overseas empire. For that reason, they asked the German government to recall von Hentig from the Levant.

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[1] Nicosia, p. 172.

[2] Warner, p. 73.

[3] Syrian statesman who led the anticolonialist movement in Syria and became the nation's first president. (Source: "Shukri al-Quwatli", https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shukri-al-Quwatli

[4] De Gaulle, v.1, p. 92.

On February 15 von Hentig left the Levant and went back to Germany. In his report he submitted on his arrival to Berlin he assumed that all the conclusions he had drawn in the Levant are applicable to the entire Arab world. According to him, Germany enjoyed immense popularity and support among the Arabs who expected German support in realizing their national aspirations. As for the British, he reported that they had deceived the Arabs and were subjecting them to strong military and political pressure. In spite of instructing him to inform about Gaullist movements, he did not differentiate between Free France and Vichy France in undermining the French, and declared that "the twenty years of French rule in Syria had brought this country to the brink of an economic abyss, disheartened and impoverished an enterprising and energetic population and deliberately debauched an aspiring youth".[1] Moreover, von Hentig criticized the Vichy French frankly and clearly when he argued that General Dentz[2] "had got off to a bad start by cultivating the minorities at the expense of the Arabs and by leaving corrupt administrative system untouched."[3] As for the defensive capabilities of the Levant, von Hentig concluded that General Dentz was prepared to defend Syria against any British assault but "a serious, self-sacrificing resistance against strong forces could not be reckoned upon."[4]

Although the Italians were not included in his mission, von Hentig observed that there was little inclination to deal with them, and the Arabs preferred to cooperate with the Germans. That is why he suggested that a German representation should be attached to the

[1] Warner, p. 74.

[2] It could be that von Henting was exaggerating the mismanagement of Dentz because the latter assumed his post in December that is almost a month and half before von Hentig left the Levant, and that was a very short period to assess the administration of Dentz.

[3] Warner, p. 74.

[4] ibid, p. 74.

unpopular Italian commission in order "to protect German interests, defend Germany's political friends and commercial partners, control and eventually prevent trade with Britain particularly in food and war materials, collect and transmit political and military information and conduct anti-British activity among the Arabs."[1]

In Berlin von Hentig's proposals were far from being implemented. Nevertheless, on March 7 Ernst Woermann the under-state secretary in the German Foreign Ministry endorsed von Hentig's proposal that a German armistice delegation be sent to the Levant and had suggested also that von Hentig himself head the delegation. Yet, this procedure did not realize due to political problems with Italy and Vichy.

Soon after von Hentig left the Levant in the midst of February troubles broke out. The ostensible origin of these troubles was the deterioration of the economic situation which was the result of the British naval blockade and the closure of the Syrian-Iraqi borders. This blockade deprived Syria and Lebanon of communicating easily with the outside world and left Turkey as the sole access to and from these two countries. This situation caused a shortage in petrol which used to be shipped from the Levant, refined in Marseille and re-shipped back to the Levant. Besides petrol, there was a lack of foodstuffs mainly bread whose price reached four times that of the pre-war level,[2] besides the spread of the black market, hoarding, and inflation. What made matters worse was the dissemination of the rumor that the Levantine wheat and other foodstuffs were being sent to France.[3] The war had raised the cost of living which aggravated the position of the unemployed,

[1] Hirszovicz, p. 114.
[2] Lipschits, p. 79.
[3] Melka, pp. 193-194.

numbering as many as 50,000 in Damascus.[1] On the other hand, the monetary issue was no less critical, Syrian and Lebanese producers and merchants refused to sell their goods in local currency and insisted on dealing with gold. Dentz immediately took measures: sugar and rice were rationed, stocks of cereals greater than 200 kg had to be declared and a bonus payment was offered for the informers about hidden stocks.[2] However; prices continued to climb and the situation did not improve.

This economic misery took visible form of unrest and protests in Damascus and Aleppo during January. Nationalist circles in Damascus exploited the popular discontent and called for a strike and shopkeepers, students and merchants were among the pioneers of this movement. The Vichy French prohibition against these movements led to the shutting of shops, intimidation and the arrests of the organizers. Weeks of overwhelming discontent resulted in a further eruption in late February in Damascus when the local administration raised the price of the standard bread to four times of the pre-war price, a poorer quality at half this price was to be reserved for the poor, but there was a general rush on the cheap bread till it was exhausted after which shops and bakeries were attacked by mobs and police counter-action led to the proclamation of a general strike.[3] 1200 persons were attested[4] but this could not stop the strike movement from spreading to most of the Syrian cities.[5] *Swastika* appeared in Damascus,[6] and the tension continued to mount and matters escalated. Demonstrations were suppressed with violence by French and Senegalese troops, armored vehicles left the barracks, and gunfire was heard. On

[1] Khoury*, Syria and the French mandate*, p. 591.
[2] De Wailly, p. 56.
[3] Kirk, p. 89.
[4] ibid, p. 89.
[5] Longrigg, pp. 301-302.
[6] De Wailly, p. 56.

March 5 there were six wounded in Damascus; in Homs three dead and two wounded on 14 March, and on 23 March nine dead and eight wounded in Aleppo.[1] Dentz contacted the Syrian government in an attempt to calm the unrest, but strike continued. After realizing that he could not reach an agreement with the nationalists he proclaimed that though a definitive establishment of Franco-Syrian relations was impossible in war conditions and independence cannot be granted until the world situation would be stabilized, yet a new government would be formed supported by consultative assembly including Druze and Alawi members and reinforced by immediate implementation of social and economic program to reduce unemployment and improve food supplies. Thus on April 2 Khalid Al-Azm agreed to form a government.[2]

By March a similar level of unrest had reached Lebanon where general strike was declared and in Beirut on April 1, a demonstration by Muslim women and children got out of hand.[3] Besides Beirut disorder spread in Tripoli and Sidon but with less violent scenes than those erupted in Syria because apart from the mere instinct of emulation the Lebanese public was inspired by a less resentful political discontent.[4] The *Najjadah* party played a major role in the organization of the protests,[5] and called along with the "*Kataeb"* party (Phalanges) for more honesty and major reforms.[6] Émile Edde, president of the republic, resigned and was replaced by Alfred Naqqash as Head of State (no longer president) who was supported by Under-Secretary and four ministers.[7] Moreover; the coverage of the strikes and the unrest by the local

[1] ibid, p. 56.
[2] De Wailly, p. 56 and Longrigg, p. 302.
[3] ibid, p. 56.
[4] Longrigg, pp. 302-203.
[5] Nordbruch, p. 97.
[6] Longrigg, p. 303.
[7] ibid, p. 303.

German press had added to the violence of the protests.[1] Besides the economic plight, the influx of German agents from September onwards had direct bearing upon the situation of Lebanon's Jews, but Dentz was too preoccupied with the deteriorating economic situation to press for the full implementation of anti-Jewish laws besides the *Kataeb* protection of the Jews during the rule Vichy France which worked with the Gestapo in Lebanon. Yet some particular problems arose only for the illegal immigration of European Jewish refugees to Palestine via Lebanon who were imprisoned in special camps[2], while Lebanese Jews continued their life uninfluenced[3] but suffered from the economic plight in the country.

On April 3 rioting resumed in the provinces of Syria, and French officers were attacked.[4] The nationalists exploited that situation and submitted their political demands to Dentz hoping that he might respond due to the popular pressure. Among these demands were: the "formation of a representative government in place of the Council of Directors which had nominally governed under French instructions since July 1939. Besides these the nationalists called for a general amnesty, the abrogation of the large powers exercised by the French advisors, abolition of press censorship and the conclusion of the treaty of 1936 between France from one side and Syria and Lebanon on the other". Dentz sought to bring about the formation of a representative government but rejected all the other requests.[5]

[1] Nordbruch, p. 98.
[2] They were from Italy, Greece, Iran, Poland and Russia, but nothing happened in the camps, since they were not concentration camps. [Source: Schulze, p. 60].
[3] Schulze, p. 60.
[4] De Wailly, p. 58.
[5] Kirk, p. 90.

The deteriorated situation convinced Dentz to comply in April with some demands of the public: He promised eventual independence for Syria but added that it would be impossible to grant it under the existing conditions[1] and in return, he asked the Arabs to be content with a much greater measure of internal autonomy[2]. On the other hand, he agreed to replace the Council of Directors with one with legislative powers[3] through a ministry presided over by a Head of Government in addition to the formation of an Advisory Assembly composed of representatives of the political, cultural and economic life of the country and of the younger generation in which Druze and Alawis would be represented.[4] He also consented to release political prisoners and to form nationalist governments in Damascus and Beirut.[5] Besides; he agreed on the execution of an important program of public work and on the participation of the Syrian Government in the organization of the food supply.[6] Finally Damascus calmed down and the strike was over.

Another explanation for the ending of the troubles was Germany's policy of avoiding the weakening of Vichy rule in the Levant through putting an end to the turmoil because destabilization in this area would benefit Britain and Free French, for that reason the Axis powers strongly advised the protesters to accept the Dentz's offer.[7] This opinion was shared by Baghdad based Mufti of Jerusalem Al-Husayni who urged the Syrian politician Shukri Al-Quwatli to bring the disturbances to an end because they were benefiting the British and the Free French[8].

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[1] Hourani, p. 235; Lipschits, p. 84 and Nordbruch, p. 98.
[2] Melka, p. 194.
[3] Khoury, *Syria and the French mandate*, p. 591
[4] Hourani, pp. 235-236.
[5] Nordbruch, p. 97.
[6] Hourani, p. 236.
[7] Nordbruch, p. 98.
[8] Melka, pp. 195-196.

Nevertheless, these political measures of Dentz were seen by some historians as signs that the Arab nationalists resume their influential role in the Levantine politics.[1] It is worth mentioning that Dentz tried to approach the Muslims in Lebanon and visited *Makassed Islamic Philanthropic Society* in Beirut which ran schools to be the first French political figure to do so and these schools never hoisted the French flag all through the French mandate period while their students chanted: *Syria is my country.*[2]

The role of von Henting in the outbreak of the troubles of January and February is ambiguous and equivocal. In fact, no prove in the German documents that asserts his involvement.[3] On the other hand, in a conversation with the US Consul-General in Beirut Cornelius van Engert on 5 March, Dentz expressed his suspicions that von Hentig played a role in the eruption of turmoil.[4] Later during his trial in 1945[5] Dentz said: "I knew perfectly well what he [von Hentig] was doing, he began to run around the country and caused an enormous amount of turmoil."[6] On the other hand, John Bagot Glubb[7] accused in his book explicitly von Hentig saying: "It seems by no means improbable that [von Hentig] came to put the

[1] Nordbruch, p. 97.
[2] An interview with Abdullah Mashnouq on 28.3.1981, [Source: Said Murad, *Al-haraka al-wahdawiya fi Lubnan bayn al-harbayn al-alamiyatayn, 1914-1945* [Unitary movement in Lebanon between the two World Wars, 1914-1946] (Beirut: Maahad al-Inma al-Arabi, 1986), v.3, p. 315].
[3] Melka, p. 192
[4] Warner, p. 72.
[5] In January 1945, Dentz was sentenced to death for aiding the Axis powers. But Charles de Gaulle, the President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic (gouvernement provisoire de la République française, or GPRF), commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. However, Dentz died in the same year.
[6] Melka, p. 192 and de Wailly, p. 55.
[7] Lieutenant-General Sir John Bagot Glubb (16 April 1897 – 17 March 1986), known as "Glubb Pasha", was a British soldier, scholar, and author, who led and trained Transjordan's Arab Legion between 1939 and 1956 as its commanding general.

final touches to the plans for outbreaks in Iraq and Syria."[1] But even if von Hentig's instructions and the general policy of the German Foreign Ministry did not provoke any promotion of the riots of January and February in the Levant, the repercussions of the British naval blockade and the misrule of the French in the Levant played a role in the agitation and the outbreak of the turmoil in region. The rise in prices, inflation, the rarity of foodstuff, the shortage of petrol and the spread of black market were all an indirect results of the British Naval blockade and hence the eruption of unrest in most parts of the Levant.

[1] *The story of the Arab Legion*, p. 256.

Chapter 4

The Iraqi coup of Al-Kilani
and
its impact on the Nazi activities in the Levant

Following the departure of von Hentig from the Levant and the outbreak of turmoil in the region, decisive events took place in Iraq which had remarkable repercussions on the activities and policies of the Germans in the Levant.[1]

These events started on April 1, 1941 when an anti-British group of four colonels known in British records as "Golden Square,"[2] executed in Baghdad a pro-German coup and overthrew the pro-British regime. They forced Taha Al-Hashimi, the Iraqi prime minister to resign and intended to arrest the Regent Emir (Prince) Abdul-Ilah[3], but the latter knew about the plot and took refuge in the American Legation on the morning of April 2, then he was smuggled out to the Royal Air Force (RAF) base at Habbaniya (85 km west of Baghdad) and then moved to Basra. After an

[1] Riayshi mentions in his book p.52 that while von Hentig was in the Levant during January and February he was closely following the work of the Iraqi commission there, and his main task was to monitor the events in Iraq and its uprising against the British.

[2] It consisted of Salah al Din Sabbagh, commanding the 3rd Division, Kamil Shabib, commanding the 1st Division, Mahmud Salman, head of the Iraq Air Force and Fahmi Said, in charge of mechanized forces. [Source: Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950, a political, social, and economic history* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 274.]

[3] On April 4, 1939, King Ghazi of Iraq died his son Faisal II was only 3 years old, a regency was set up under his pro-British Uncle Emir (Prince) Abdul-Ilah.

unsuccessful attempt to organize resistance Abdul-Ilah, the Regent, left Basra for Amman,[1] a pro-British destination that was under the British mandate as well. On April 3, after the flee of the Regent the new "National Defense Government" took possession of the radio station and telephone exchanges and it replaced the government of Taha Al-Hashimi with another one included Rashid Aali[2] Al-Kilani[3] as Prime Minister. In its first meeting, the National Defense Government decided to send a memorandum to the British

[1] Warner p. 86.

[2] This name in Arabic is " عالي" and should not be confused with "Ali علي"

[3] On March 31, 1940, Al-Kilani was as appointed Prime Minister, and he was an Arab nationalist known for his opposition to Britain. While in ministry he had refrained from breaking relations with Italy in spite of the insistence of the British ambassador in Baghdad who asserted that Iraq should abide by the stipulations of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 which the previous Iraqi government followed and broke relations with Germany. Al-Kilani government also imposed restrictions on the activities of the British and their propaganda against the Axis on the pretext of avoiding crises with these countries. On the other hand, Britain refused to provide the Iraqi army with arms and weapons and refrained from buying Iraqi cotton and dates. On February 26, 1941 Uthman Kamal Haddad, the Mufti Al-Husayni's private secretary told Woermann the under-state secretary in the German Foreign Ministry that Al-Kilani government had rejected British pressure to contribute to the construction of a paved road linking Iraq with Egypt via Transjordan and Palestine, over which British troops and supplies would move from Basra to the front in Cyrenaica, Libya. Hence British Iraqi relations began to deteriorate especially after the knowledge of the British about the contacts of the Iraqi Minster of Justice Naji Shawkat with Franz von Papen the German ambassador in Ankara. The British ambassador realized the difficulty of cooperating with the Al-Kilani government and eventually, tension arose between the two parties and the British ambassador insisted on the resignation of this prime minister. Finally, Al-Kilani resigned on 31 January 1941 in order to avoid civil war in the country and was replaced by Taha Al-Hashimi. On the other hand, the British embassy in Baghdad practiced pressure on the prime minister to rupture relations with Italy after the latter entered the war with the side of Germany. The British also pressed on Al-Hashimi to make changes in the army in favor of the Regent. These developments besides the discontent in the army led to the coup of the *Golden Square*.
[Source: Hamed Al-Hamdani, *Inqilab Rashid Aali Al-Kilani* [Rashid Aali Al-Kilani coup], http://hamid-alhamdany.blogspot.com/2018/11/12-2102018.html]

government warning it against interfering in Iraq's internal affairs and providing support and aid to Regent Abdul-Ilah.[1]

The reaction to Al-Kilani's return to power in London was unfavorable and considered unconstitutional although he spared no time to present his government's respect to the international obligations and in particular the treaty with Britain. Yet the British Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East were not in favor of any armed intervention in Iraq especially after the German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia and Rommel's[2] offensive in Cyrenaica (Libya) during the spring of 1941. Furthermore; Archibald Wavell,[3] British commander in chief for the Middle East, informed the chiefs of staff that due to the critical situation in Libya and the Balkans, he could not spare even one battalion from Palestine to defend the RAF at Habbaniaya. At this point Churchill turned to the India Command, and on April 8 he wrote to the Secretary of State for India: "Sometime ago you suggested that you might be able to spare another division for the Middle East. The situation in Iraq has turned sour. We must make sure of Basra as the Americans are increasingly keen on a great air assembling base being formed to which they could deliver direct."[4]

On April 13 the British Ambassador in Iraq Sir Kinahan Cornwallis informed Al-Kilani that in accordance with the treaty of 1930, Britain will send troops from India to the Middle East via

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[1] Hamed Al-Hamdani, *Inqilab Rashid Aali Al-Kilani* [Rashid Aali Al-Kilani coup], http://hamid-alhamdany.blogspot.com/2018/11/12-2102018.html

[2] Erwin Rommel, German field marshal was appointed commander of the German *Afrika Korps* troops dispatched to aid the defeated Italian army in Libya.

[3] Archibald Percival Wavell British field marshal and government administrator and British commander in chief for the Middle East whose victories against the Italians in North Africa during the early part of World War II were offset by his inability to defeat the German *Afrika Korps* under General Erwin Rommel (1941).

[4] Winston Spencer Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III "The Grand Alliance" (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949-1953), p. 255.

Iraq. Al-Kilani approved the passage of these troops, and when on April 17 and 18 both airborne and seaborne troops arrived he gave prompt permission for their landing, but soon under pressure from the Iraqi army messages were sent to Cornwallis demanding that the British forces should pass on quickly and in small detachments.[1] This Iraqi attitude accelerated the tension between the two governments.

On April 20 Churchill informed Cornwallis that: "Our chief interest in sending troops to Iraq is the covering and establishment of a great base at Basra and that what happens up-country, except at Habbaniya, is at the present time on an altogether lower priority. Our rights under the treaty were invoked to cover this disembarkation and to avoid bloodshed, but force would be used to the utmost limit to secure the disembarkation if necessary. Our position at Basra therefore does not rest solely on the treaty, but also on a new event arising out of war. No undertakings can be given that troops will be sent to Baghdad or moved through Palestine, and the right to require such undertakings should not be recognized in respect of a Government which has in itself usurped power by a coup d'état or in a country where our treaty rights have so long been frustrated in spirit."[2]

Newly British forces landed at Basra on April 29, and in return the Iraqi forces stationed at Rashid Camp, 7 miles (11 km) south of Baghdad were ordered to move to Habbaniya. The next day Cornwallis protested to the Iraqi government against this action but was told that it was a precautionary measure, and on the same day Al-Kilani also protested that the British landing was contrary to the terms of the treaty. Meanwhile British and American women and children were advised to leave Baghdad while British and

[1] Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958, a study in Iraqi politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 219.
[2] Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III "The Grand Alliance", pp. 225-226.

American men were asked to assemble outside the British Embassy or the American Legation. At this juncture both sides realized that there was no possibility of coming to an understanding.[1]

In an anti-British step, Iraqi forces occupied the oilfields at Kirkuk[2] and closed the oil pipeline from there to Haifa to interrupt the supply of fuel to the British forces in Palestine and restored on the other hand the pumping of oil to the Vichy-controlled port of Tripoli (north Lebanon) which was cut off by Britain since the armistice between France and Germany.[3]

On May 2 fighting had broken out between British and Iraqi forces at the Habbaniya air base. This base was manned by around 1500 fighters many of them were Assyrian, Kurds and Arabs, besides 350 members of the RAF.[4] On the same day, the British ambassador issued an ultimatum to the Iraqi government urging it to withdraw its forces from the outskirts of Habbaniya and threatened to take the most severe military measures against it. As a result of these rapid developments and events, the Council of Ministers met and took important decisions in foreign policy and in the defense of Iraq, among them:

- Restoring relations with Germany and requesting the immediate dispatch of its political representative and asking assistance from the government in Berlin.

- Issuing a statement from the Prime Minister on the British aggression against the Iraqi forces.

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[1] Khadduri, pp. 220-222.

[2] Christopher Buckley, *Five ventures, Iraq – Syria – Persia – Madagascar – Dodecanese* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1954), p. 10.

[3] De Wailly, p. 72.

[4] Al-Aqqad, p. 77.

- Sending a protest to the British government over its attitude towards Iraq.[1]

Though the Iraqi revolt was regarded as premature by Germany and Italy, but they did not lose sight of its importance in the general war against Britain. With the outbreak of hostilities, the German and Italian radio stations announced that Al-Kilani had raised standard of freedom against British imperialism and promised immediate Axis support.[2] On April 12 Germany and Italy issued a common declaration[3] in which they informed Al-Kilani that they follow his actions with the greatest sympathy and advise armed resistance against Britain as soon as the relationship of forces involved offers promise of success. The declaration added that Italy and Germany are actively preparing assistance in the form of ammunition and hope to overcome the well-known difficulties with respect to the transport route.[4] In fact this "transport route" which pushed the Levant into the Iraqi dispute as will be discussed later.

During the next few days, British planes from Habbaniya bombed the Iraqi positions near the base, while the Iraqis responded with relatively ineffective artillery fire. By May 6 the Iraqis withdrew, while the British took advantage of the opportunity and thus planned to capture or destroy enemy troops and materials.[5] After the withdrawal from Habbaniya, Al-Kilani declared that the defense line at the Euphrates might be in danger if Axis aircraft do not interfere, and by May 13 the British had advanced into Iraq from the west and occupied the fort of Rutba (around 425 km west

[1] Al-Hamdani, http://hamid-alhamdany.blogspot.com/2018/11/12-2102018.html.
[2] Khadduri, pp. 229-230.
[3] This declaration was reported by the Italians on April 19 [Source: Melka, p. 219].
[4] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 322, pp. 526-527.
[5] Melka, p. 253.

of Baghdad) which had been abandoned by its Iraqi defenders a few days later.[1]

Al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem who had preferred to influence the course of events behind the scenes during his stay in Baghdad, suddenly emerged to arouse public opinion against Britain throughout the Muslim World. In a speech broadcast on May 9 he declared *jihad* (Muslim holy war) and invited every able-bodied Muslim to take part in the war against the greatest foe of Islam.[2]

Already on April 10, Ernst Woermann, the under-state secretary in the German Foreign Ministry, recorded that Hitler decided that weapons of all types can be available to Iraq and Germany could deliver military assistance to the Iraqi government.[3] On May 2, Al-Kilani received scant feedback from the Japanese concerning aid, because according to them the situation in Iraq and in the Arabian Sea forbade such deliveries.[4] Later Germany studied another possible route for help and that was dispatching part of an arms shipment for Iran. On May 6 Al-Kilani urgently asked that by means of "friendly pressure" from the Axis, Iran be persuaded to let him have some of the German arms already delivered to Iran. On the same day Woermann approached the Iranians with the request that they either permit some war material destined for them to be dropped off in Iraq or to be sent back from Iran to Iraq. But on May 8 the Germans learned that Iran would not relinquish any arms that had been delivered to her.[5] Another alternative plan was the Levant. But the Germans did not have the means to ensure their sea lines of communication to Syria and Lebanon and then to Iraq as long as the eastern Mediterranean was under the control of the

[1] ibid, p. 254.
[2] Khadduri, p. 224.
[3] Melka, p. 220.
[4] ibid, p. 236.
[5] ibid, pp. 237-238.

Allies and all that remained was to rely on the Italian fleet to open the sea route, but its defeat in a battle Cape Matapan[1] had demoralized its crew. On the other hand, the land route that crosses Turkey was inaccessible as long as Hitler was convinced that Turkey's neutrality should not be violated, and thus it was difficult to establish a line of communication through Syria without Turkish aid.[2] Finally it was decided in Germany that there remained only the air route through Syria and Lebanon which was at the same time the only route through the use of transit facilities and airfields for deliveries by air and for sending *Luftwaffe* to Iraq.[3] Besides these facilities, the Levant had another advantage and that was the stock of arms stored there, and thus it would not be necessary to ship large quantities of war materials from the German controlled territories to Iraq. It is here at this point that the Levant states became practically involved in the Iraqi conflict though they did not take any side with and party in that dispute, and above all their local governments and people did not share or have any view or opinion concerning these arms delivery plans.

What made the Levantine route applicable and acceptable for the Germans was what had been revealed on April 28 about the "willingness of the government of Vichy to go beyond the stipulations of the Armistice Treaty in meeting German wishes and thus prove by actions their willingness to collaborate".[4] In the light of these developments, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, suggested that in return for German permission to put back into service seven French submarines[5] and six destroyers Vichy is requested to agree on several concessions

[1] Lies at the southernmost point of mainland Greece.
[2] Von Papen, p. 43.
[3] Melka, p. 238.
[4] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 417, p. 659.
[5] Many German documents dealing with this exchange mention "torpedo boats" instead of "submarines." [Source: Melka, p. 232 footnote No. 1].

which included providing Iraq with arms from the military stores in the Levant under the Italian Armistice Commission and assisting these arms shipments to Iraq through the Levant and giving the permission for stopovers in the Levant of German planes flying to Iraq, besides the replacement of unreliable officials in the Levant, Tunisia, Algeria and the French West Africa in accordance with a list of German and Italian recommendations.[1] Ribbentrop proposed that Otto Abetz (see photo No. 9 in Appendix 1), the German ambassador in Paris, would pass verbally the German suggestions to Admiral François Darlan (see photo No. 7 in Appendix 1), Pétain's deputy, in the presence of an OKW (*Oberkommande der Wehrmacht* – High Command of the Armed Forces) representative.[2] Abetz knew exactly the weak point of Darlan: the neutralized French fleet, so according to this German ambassador in return for rearmament of French warships Darlan would agree on allowing German planes to stopover in the Levant while shipping arms to Iraq. [3]

On May 3 the German government approved Ribbentrop's proposal, and on the same day instructions were given to Abetz to meet Darlan in Paris with the emphasis on the question of arms shipments from the Levant to Iraq. During their meeting, Abetz informed Darlan that Hitler would arrange a personal interview with him and that Germany was ready to offer concessions if the Vichy government would agree to send arms to Iraq from French stocks in the Levant and allow German planes to use Levantine airfields. Darlan gave his personal agreement on the German proposals and promised that he would secure the agreement of the Cabinet at Vichy.[4] But he pointed to the difficulties entailed in

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 421, p. 663.
[2] Melka, p. 239.
[3] Lipschits, p.91.
[4] Melka, p. 240.

pursuing such a policy and asked for real and substantial concessions in return for his government's involving itself so deeply on Germany's side.[1]

Then Darlan left for Vichy to inform his government about the talks with Abetz and to convey its reply to the Germans.

After consultations in Vichy, Darlan returned back to Paris on May 5 and brought the agreement of Pétain and the cabinet ministers on the German plans with respect to the shipment of arms to Iraq through the Levant.[2] On the same day Abetz discussed with Darlan:

1- The question of deliveries from French stocks under Italian control.
2- The possibility of intermediate landing[3] of German aircraft in the Levant
destined for Iraq.
3- The question of German concessions in return for the assistance given in the Levant.[4]

Haunted by the fear of security leaks regarding his concessions to the Germans, Darlan recommended in his discussion with Abetz[5] "that it would be most advisable for reasons of security if a German and French plenipotentiary were to fly to Beirut by French commercial plane for the purpose of informing orally the chairman of the Italian Control Commission and General Dentz of the

[1] Hirszowicz, p. 159.
[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 459, p. 718.
[3] Intermediate landing stands for "an unscheduled stop by an aircraft, usually for emergency or safety reasons." [Source: What does intermediate landing mean? http://acronymsandslang.com/definition/7718247/intermediate%20landing.-meaning.html].
[4] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 459, p. 718.
[5] Melka, p. 245.

agreement reached in Paris."[1] Darlan informed Abetz also that the French government needed to make sure that the weapons released actually pass across the Iraqi borders and do not fall into the hands of natives in the Levant while being transported. It was agreed also that Darlan will have instructions sent to Dentz by telegraph concerning the assistance to the German aircraft forced to land in the Levant. Moreover; Darlan proposed a newly constructed airfield in the Levant northeast of the Euphrates where it would be hard to spot its location by foreign observers and requested that gasoline supply be brought by German cargo planes. He also requested that German planes should not have German markings and that the crew should not be recognizable as military personnel. As a precaution against surprises, Darlan suggested release of antiaircraft artillery for the protection of the airfield. In the event of British protests, he would deny all allegations and in case a pictorial evidence was submitted, he would issue a statement that it was a matter of emergency landings made in error by aircraft of unknown origin purchased by the Iraqi government. Darlan remarked that the anti-British faction in the French government and the government as a whole needed obvious results which had a direct appeal to the public in order to strengthen internal political support for collaboration with Germany. Among such results was a relaxation of the demarcation line between occupied and unoccupied France with respect to the postal service. On the other hand, Abetz stressed that Darlan treats the question of arms shipments to the Levant most confidentially in Vichy because – according to Abetz- all the negotiations of the French Armistice Commission were reported to Admiral William Leahy, the United States ambassador to Vichy.[2]

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 459, p. 719.
[2] ibid, pp. 719-720.

On the morning of May 6, Darlan sent an aide to Vichy to instruct authorities in the Levant to assist German planes to land there as agreed in his discussions with Abetz.[1] After two days the results of the negotiations of Paris between the Vichy group headed by Darlan and the German group headed by Abetz were released as follows[2]:

In the military-political field the following concession were obtained from Vichy:

a. The stocks of Vichy arms under the Italian control in the Levant to be made available for shipment to Iraq.
b. Providing assistance in sending the arms shipments of other origin that arrive in the Levant by land or sea destined for Iraq.
c. Allowing German planes flying to Iraq to land and refuel in the Levant.
d. Supplying Iraq with reconnaissance and warplanes as well as bombs from the air force permitted for the Levant states under the Armistice Treaty.
e. Preparing an airfield in the Levant especially for the landing of German planes, the airport at Palmyra was considered for this purpose.
f. Until this airfield is ready an order to be issued to all airfields in the Levant states to assist in the landing of the German planes.

Germany in return will make the following concessions:

a- Giving permission for rearming seven French torpedo boats.
b- Relaxing the communication across the demarcation line between occupied and unoccupied France through allowing

[1] Melka, p. 243.
[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 475, pp. 740-741.

the French population to carry open postcards without printed forms, and through issuing to Vichy infantry and airmen the same number of passes as to the naval men and providing passes for cases of illness or bereavement in additions to opening the demarcation line for the movement of goods and people.

c- Seeking immediate negotiations for the reduction of the occupation cost.

The discussions between Abetz and Darlan in Paris on May 5 did not refer to any major Italian role or function in the shipment of arms to Iraq. The OKW believed that Italian participation in this arms deal would be inappropriate and would only make more difficult negotiations with the French. Walter Warlimont a German staff officer during World War II who served as deputy chief of the Operations Staff, one of departments in the OKW, thought that Italian effort would hardly be effective. Woermann believed that German operations in the Levant would actually be endangered by simultaneous Italian action in that area and it would be better concentrated elsewhere.[1]

Another party was ignored in the Abetz-Darlan talks and that was the Levantine people, the Syrian nationalist and even the mandate governments of Syria and Lebanon, their land and airspace were the subject matter of discussions and agreements between the French and the German only. The Levantines did not have any opinion or point of view in all what took place between these two European powers concerning the passage through the Levant to ship arms to Iraq. It was a real imperialism.

As for the recommendation of Darlan regarding the dispatch of German and French plenipotentiary Abetz selected for this mission Rudolf Rahn (see photo No. 8 in Appendix 1) as the German

[1] Melka, pp. 244-245.

personality, the second secretary in the embassy in Paris and a Francophile who believed in Franco-German cooperation as the future of Europe.[1] Although this mission should have been assumed by von Hentig, but the German government had to give up sending the latter to the Levant since Vichy authorities suspected that he had inspired the March and April unrest there and because of his Arab connections particularly among Syrian nationalists. But it was planned that von Hentig would replace Rahn later on if circumstances permit.[2] On the other hand, Darlan appointed Jacques Guérard as his representative and gave him the necessary instructions for General Dentz and the military commanders in Syria and Lebanon.[3] Guérard, a veteran of Verdun battle, was a president of insurance companies and a rich banker who moved in political circles and taken office in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, his false papers identified him as a journalist.[4]

On May 6, Abetz ordered Rahn to fly to the Levant to prepare for the purchase of the Iraqi arms. Abetz informed Rahn that in the opinion of the French the Levant of all the French overseas possessions was most strongly affected by de Gaullism and Dentz was known as an Anglophile. Abetz asked Rahn also to get the agreement of the Italian Armistice Commission in the Levant to release the stores of arms and provide the most suitable transportation route to Iraq and to prevent any sabotaging of the shipment by the de Gaullists.[5] Rahn was allocated half a million marks for his mission, half in gold and the rest in French francs.[6]

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[1] Richard James, *Australia's war with France: The campaign in Syria and Lebanon, 1941* (Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2017), p. 96.

[2] Melka, pp. 742-743 and Hirszowicz, p. 162 and Lipschits, p.92.

[3] Hirszowicz, p. 162.

[4] James, p. 96, and "Jacques Guérard", https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Gu%C3%A9rard].

[5] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 237.

[6] Hirszowicz, p. 162.

According to von Papen the aim of Rahn from providing arms for the Iraqis was to obtain oil and petrol for the *Luftwaffe*.[1]

While arms and transit rights for the German aircraft were secured in the Levant from Darlan's government, German representation was being established with Al-Kilani government, and Fritz Grobba represented Germany in Baghdad on May 6. With this representation and the mission of Rahn, Germany had become de facto ally of Iraq in the struggle against Britain and had taken further step to bring the Levan to this struggle.[2]

Rahn flew to the Levant on May 7 via Berlin, Athens and Rhodes and finally his plane landed in Aleppo on May 9 afternoon, he was accompanied by Guérard whose mission was to establish contacts with Dentz and the French General Staff in Syria,[3] and to protect the French rule in the Levant against German encroachment and against possible British reaction.[4] From Aleppo they flew to Beirut on the next day (May 10) in a special French plane.

After refusing to travel to meet his guests,[5] Dentz received Rahn in Beirut courteously.[6] Before starting their talks, the High Commissioner complained about the mission of von Henting which resulted -according to Dentz- in a series of disorders, demonstrations, strikes and small revolts which up to the date of Rahn's arrival Dentz had not been able to put down completely and which had taken a toll of over 100 lives. Rahn responded that his mission was to prove that Franco-German collaboration would lead to tangible results. From this point of view both regarded the Iraqi question as the criterion of French good will and thus Dentz

[1] Von Papen, p. 44.
[2] Melka, p. 248.
[3] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 237.
[4] Melka, p. 247.
[5] James p. 97
[6] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 239.

could win the battle of France. Finally, Dentz agreed to support Darlan's policy and asked what quantities of arms could be sent to Iraq without jeopardizing the fighting strength of the French.[1]

On the afternoon of that day (May 10) they arranged a second meeting with the presence of general Fedele de Giorgis, the head of the Italian Armistice Commission, to release the arms that were stored and to prepare the planes that were tightly packed in the sheds among the various airports. They agreed after some bargaining on a list of arms for Iraq composed of 15,500 guns and 200 machine guns with 900 belts of ammunition and 5 million rounds and four 7.5 field guns with 10,000 rounds, all with the proper equipment, accessories and spare parts. This transport was so assembled that each individual shipment was a unit in itself and was entirely usable in the event of the loss of another shipment. Rahn succeeded in putting the whole transport of the arms in record time.[2]

These arms and weapons would be sent to Iraq through the Aleppo-Mosul railway after giving advance notice of 5 days to the government in Ankara for each transport through Turkish territory because this railway line passed for 200 miles in the Turkish territory,[3] (see *Map* – 9 in Appendix 4). In order to avoid five days waiting Rahn suggested to Dentz during their meeting that the Turks be informed that the latter feared that the thinly garrisoned Syrian-Iraqi borders would be endangered by Iraqi troops who might disperse into bands to the north east due to British attacks

[1] ibid, p. 239.

[2] Ibid, p. 240 and Hirszowicz, p. 163.

[3] This railway is part of the Berlin–Baghdad railway which was started in 1903 to connect Berlin with Baghdad during the Ottoman period. The last stretch to Baghdad was built in the late 1930s and the first train to travel from Istanbul to Baghdad departed in 1940. [Source: Jonathan S. McMurray, *Distant ties: Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the construction of the Baghdad Railway*) Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 200l), p. 2.

and hence these troops might enter the Levant, and therefore Dentz would request immediate Turkish permission for the transit of 200 men with material destined to Syro-Iraqi borders at the village of Tel Kotchek, (see *Map* – 9 in Appendix 4) and in order to reach there the military trains had to pass through Turkey. Dentz agreed to this suggestion and the permission was received from the Turks in a few hours later. The Turks later protested against this deception, but did not interfere with the transports that followed. [1]

On the evening of that day (May 10) Rahn and his staff followed Dentz to Damascus.[2]

The weapons which Vichy would shipped to Iraq were stored in the Levant according to the stipulation of the June 1940 Armistice Convention. They were worth 120 million francs, the Germans would pay 85 million from the occupation indemnity paid by Vichy to the *Wehrmacht* (the Unified Armed Forces of Germany),

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 241.

[2] After a brief stay in the Levant, Rahn expressed his disappointment in the Arab movement there, he said: "I found to my astonishment that there was at all events no Arab movement there [in the Levant]. True nationalist sentiment is unknown to the Syrian tribes, a wild and for the most part, unlovely mixture of races and religions, spoiled by greed, intrigue and jealousy, accustomed from olden times to bribery by rival powers. What Beirut wants is opposed by Damascus. What Damascus advocates is considered treason in Aleppo, Homs or Hama. Independence is the pretext for unbridled speculation, freedom the shield for unrestrained exploitation of the workers by the ruling class. Even the best racial part, the Bedouins, have succumbed the general corruption and follow whichever power is the strongest as the jackal follows the beast of prey. All of them demand arms in order to plunder the neighboring tribe; all demand money in order to extort still greater sums from the enemy power. Undoubtedly the European powers above all the French Mandate Government are mainly responsible for this, and undoubtedly among the youth of Syria, too, forces are stirring that clamor for a cleanup and national concentration. At any rate, I found nothing in Syria that would have been capable of militant action. At the moment of danger, they all failed, the swaggering leaders of the Arab freedom movement. In Undisguised anxiety, they asked for our assistance in fleeing abroad, if they had not already preferred "as a precaution" to make contact with the English. [Source: *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 250].

and the remaining 35 million francs were to be paid in Iraqi products such as wheat and dates.[1]

Prior to his talks with Rahn on May 10, Dentz had a different attitude regarding the use of the Levantine airfields by the Germans to send aid to Al-Kilani. Already before the outbreak of fighting in Iraq the British had been aware of the fact that the Levantine airfields were very tempting for the Germans. On April 29 the British Consul-General in Beirut, Sir Godfrey Havard, visited Dentz and reported to him that a concentration of German and Italian aircraft had been spotted on the Greek island of Leros in the southern Aegean Sea facing Turkey which could be a prelude to an Axis attack on Cyprus. Havard explained that the Germans could be interested in capturing the Levantine airfields in order to launch from them an attack against Cyprus from the rear.[2] Dentz on the other hand reassured that he would not tolerate the use of force against the airfields in the Levant by anyone whatsoever and that he would protect them against any sudden attack as he would defend the Levant against any aggression. The next day, April 30, Dentz informed Charles Huntziger, the Vichy War Minister, that the German move towards Suez and Iraq would lead to a hypothesis that they attempt to make use of the airfields in the Levant, and Article 10 of the Armistice Convention forbids all hostile actions against German forces. Dentz added that instructions had been given to Navy and Air Force to oppose by force any landing or any hostile act by a foreign air force, even ex-enemy. Finally, he inquired if his point of view was in accordance with the intentions of the Vichy government and asked the minister to send him all the relevant instructions in that matter. On May 4, Huntziger telegraphed Dentz in answer to his request in which he urged him to take into account that France under the Armistice

[1] Lipschits, p.93.
[2] De Wailly, p. 76.

Convention is not a neutral power in relation to Germany, and it is not possible under these conditions to treat German armed forces as those of an enemy. Huntziger, on the other hand, ordered Dentz to oppose by force any intervention by British forces, in case they should seek to intervene in any manner whatever.[1] On May 6 Darlan telegrammed Dentz and informed him that the negotiations between the French and German governments are in progress, Darlan continued "it is the utmost importance for the success of these negotiations that if German planes destined for Iraq land in the mandate states you should give them every facility to continue their flights." Dentz replied on the following day "your message received and well understood, and I am issuing the appropriate instructions, however; in case of hostile acts committed by German or Italian aircraft in flight or landing, the airfield commanders have the right to defend themselves."[2] Thus, Dentz acquiesced when confronted with stern orders from the Vichy government and his position concerning the landing of German planes in the Levant had shifted dramatically from "directing instructions to the naval and air forces to oppose any landing of any foreign air force, even if it was a former enemy", to "facilitating the landing of German planes heading to Iraq and refrain treating Germany as an enemy"; and this indicated visibly the extent of the influence of the Nazis Germans in the decisions of the Vichy government in metropolitan France and its overseas possessions as well including the Levant. Not only this, but also the governments of the mandate Levant had no opinion or view in all these decisions which had direct impact on the peoples of these states and their interests and lives. The fate of these peoples at that time was decided by the three European powers: Germany, France and Britain.

[1] Lipschits, p. 94.
[2] Kirk, p. 93.

While the fighting was taking place in Iraq, the German aircraft started to land in the Levantine airfields as of the second week of May.[1] The German bombers arrived Damascus under the command of Major Axel von Bloomberg,[2] but Rahn asked him if possible not to land further planes via Damascus which was too near to the British air bases which offered the British espionage service a convenient field for activity. Rahn recommended Palmyra whose large airfield lay at some distance from the city and completely isolated in the desert.[3] On the other hand, Dentz too, tried to restrict the use of German aircraft of the airfields to that of Palmyra only as being the most remote from the populated areas, but later he was ordered by Vichy to place the airfield of Nayrab (near Aleppo) at their disposal and to provide protection for them.
On the other hand, the first trainload of arms from Aleppo escorted by Rahn in person reached Mosul on May 13, and on the same day Grobba with Colonel Qasim Maqsud, officer commanding the Mosul Forces, signed a three-year agreement with Rahn arranging the payment for the arms. Rahn from his side, tended to boost the material and psychological resistance of the French in the Levant, so upon Dentz's complaint regarding the scarcity of food supplies, Rahn suggested a plan whereby in return of arms and weapons sent to Al-Kilani food from Iraq would be shipped to the Levantine market.[4] Al-Kilani approved the agreement and shipped two trains of wheat, rice, sugar and oil to Syria. In all only four trainloads of

[1] Lipschits mentions May 9, pp. 94-95, while Kirk specifies the date in the early morning of May 12, p. 93.
[2] Bloomberg was accidently killed the next day while he was landing his plane in Baghdad.
[3] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 242.
[4] Melka, p. 312.

arms reached Iraq before a bridge near Tel Kotchek was blown up[1] putting an end to rail traffic.[2]

M. Gardener, the British consul in Damascus discussed On May 12 the landing of the German aircraft with Dentz, the incident was not denied it was rather presented as if the planes were obliged to make urgent stopover without any previous agreement.[3] On the same day after a British reconnaissance plane flew over the airfield of Damascus Dentz placed all the mandate states in a state of defense and concentrated troops on the Palestinian borders.[4] Thereafter frequent air reconnaissances were carried out over Palmyra, Mezze (near Damscus), Aleppo, Homs, Riyaq and Deir Ezzur, and after receiving permission from London, attacks were launched from time to time against German aircraft when they were observed.[5]

On May 11 and 12 Darlan was invited to meet with Hitler at Berchtesgaden.[6] Darlan reminded the *Führer* of what Vichy was doing in the Levant. In return, Darlan asked only that the integrity of France's empire be guaranteed. As conversation ended, Darlan reaffirmed that France has already manifested its desire to collaborate with the Reich in economic and military realms by lending its effective support in Syria.[7]

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[1] Playfair mentions in his book *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, v. II, the Germans come to help their Ally* p. 195 that Rahn attributed this destruction to British agents, but Playfair considers that it was the work of some enterprising Frenchmen. [Source: S. O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, v. II, the Germans come to help their Ally, 1941* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1956)].

[2] Khadduri, pp. 232-233.

[3] Lipschits, p. 95.

[4] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 243.

[5] Playfair, p. 201.

[6] A municipality in the district Berchtesgaden Land, Bavaria, in southeastern Germany, near the border with Austria, where Hitler had been vacationing in it since the 1920s.

[7] Jafna L. Cox, "The background to Syrian campaign, May-June 1941: A study in Franco-German wartime relations", *History*, October 1987, vol. 72, No. 236, p. 444.

Darlan informed Dentz on May 14 that the Franco-German talks had ended, and the government of Vichy had adopted the principle of collaboration with Germany. Darlan added that "this collaboration does not imply declaration of war against Britain, yet the orders to resist with force any British attack are confirmed".[1] On the same day, Catroux had dropped leaflets on Damascus calling upon the French to rise in revolt,[2] posing serious risk to the loyalty of the French administration.[3]

Meanwhile, on May 14 and 15, the RAF had bombarded the airfields of Palmyra, and Riyaq (in the Beqaa valley, Lebanon) and Mezze (near Damascus), which the Germans were using.[4] According to Rahn, Dentz was entirely calm and serene in his composure with respect to this bombing.[5] Yet on May 16 Dentz issued the following statement in which he spoke of emergency landing of German planes at Levantine airfields: "German aircraft have recently passed in transit over Syria, fifteen of them in the last few days have made forced landing on Syrian airfields. In accordance with the Armistice terms the French authorities have taken steps to assure that these aircraft should leave as quickly as possible. The activities of the British aircraft are obvious acts of hostility against France."[6]

In London, Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State at the British Foreign Office, made a statement in the House of Commons on May 15 regarding the issue of the German aircraft landing in the

[1] Kirk, p. 94.
[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 244.
[3] Nordbruch, p. 100.
[4] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 244. and Kirk, p. 94.
[5] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 245.
[6] *Daily Telegraph,* 17 May, 1941.

Levant,[1] he said: "Detailed information at the disposal of His Majesty's Government shows that the French authorities in Syria are allowing German aircraft to use Syrian aerodromes as staging posts for flights to Iraq. His Majesty's Government have in consequence given full authority for action to be taken against these German aircraft on Syrian aerodromes. The French Government cannot escape responsibility for this situation. Their action under German orders in permitting these flights is a clear breach of the armistice terms and is inconsistent with undertakings given by the French Government."[2]

The British attacks continued on Riyaq and Palmyra airfields on May 18. At Riyaq the French opened up with heavy but in accurate anti-aircraft.[3] On the other hand, the *Luftwaffe* began to attack the British in Habbaniya on May 16 and 20 with considerable success, the British despite the rising waters of the Euphrates and the floods, were able to reach Habbaniya on the 18th and Falluja (located roughly 69 km west of Baghdad on the Euphrates) on the 20th and proceeded to Baghdad. [4]

On May 21 negotiations were concluded in Paris between Vichy and the Germans to formalize agreements reached earlier in that month, these agreements were known as the "Paris Protocols." The one relating to Syria and Iraq was formulated on the evening of May 23.[5] According to this protocol the Vichy government obligated itself to:

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[1] *Royal Air Force Narrative: The Campaign in Syria,* https://www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/units/air-historical-branch/second-world-war-campaign-narratives/middle-east-campaigns-vol-ix-the-campaign-in-syria-june-1941/, p. 8.

[2] *Mr Anthony Eden: speeches in 1941 (Hansard) - the API*, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1941/may/15/syria-german-aircraft#S5CV0371P0_19410515_HOC_260

[3] *Royal Air Force Narrative: The Campaign in Syria***,** p. 9.

[4] Khadduri, p. 233 and Hirszowicz, p. 168.

[5] Hirszowicz, p. 161.

1- Turn over to Iraq about three quarters of the war materials stored in Syria.
2- Agree to the landing of German and Italian planes, provide them with fuel and to make available to the *Luftwaffe* a special base at Aleppo.
3- Permit the use of ports, roads and railways for transport to Iraq.
4- Train in Syria Iraqi soldiers equipped with French arms.
5- Give the OKW all information on British strength and plans in the Middle East in the possession of the Vichy intelligence.
6- Defend the Levant with all available forces.

In return, the OKW agreed to the strengthening of French forces in Syria beyond the limits fixed by the Armistice Convention[1] by allowing the Vichists to send war materials and land- and air-troops from France to the Levant via Salonika. But Dentz advised against their disembarkation at Beirut or Tripoli in order to maintain secrecy and avert a possible British reaction, instead, he recommended the use of the landing stage in the bay of Shaqaa (around 15 km south of Tripoli).[2]

The protocol of 21st May confirmed the assistance of the government of Vichy to German forces in Syria and Lebanon. British Consuls and Consul-General were ordered to leave these two states, and the government in London declared significantly that in face of open French collaboration with the Germans it must hold itself free to "attack the enemy wherever he may be found."[3] With this protocol, the Nazi Germany abrogated the neutrality of the Levant and involved it in the Iraqi dispute without even the participation and the knowledge of the Levantines themselves who

[1] ibid, p. 161.
[2] Kirk, p. 95.
[3] Longrigg, p. 305 and Kirk, p. 96.

were outside the circle of all the talks and negotiations between the Germans and the French. The Syrian and Lebanese were largely ignorant of these developments and threats, and they continued to find themselves watching the course of the war with every variety of hope or apprehension and in struggling day by day with economic conditions in which hunger or famine might again make their appearance.[1] Moreover; the stipulations of the protocol were among the factors which had given pretext to the Free French and the British to attack the Levant and later occupy it.

On May 22 the British Foreign Secretary declared: "If the Vichy Government, in pursuance of their declared policy of collaboration with the enemy, take action or permit action detrimental to our conduct of the war, or designed to assist the enemy's war effort, we shall naturally hold ourselves free to attack the enemy wherever he may be found, and in so doing we shall no longer feel bound to draw any distinction between occupied and unoccupied territories in the execution of our military plans".[2]

On next day, May 23 Hitler issued a directive known as *Directive 30 – The Middle East* in which he declared his support to the Arab liberation movement and Iraq. The text of this directive relevant to Iraq and the Levant is as follows: [3]

"The Arab Liberation Movement is our natural ally against Britain in the Middle East. In this connection particular importance must be attached to the rising in Iraq. It is strengthening the anti-British forces in the Middle East beyond the frontiers of Iraq, disrupting

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[1] Longrigg, p. 305.

[2] *Mr Anthony Eden: speeches in 1941 (Hansard) - the API*, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1941/may/22/franco-german-collaboration#S5CV0371P0_19410522_HOC_281.

[3] Full text in: S. O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, v. II, the Germans come to help their Ally, 1941* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1956), pp. 333-334.

communications and containing British troops and shipping space at the expense of other theatres. I have therefore decided to hasten developments in the Middle East by supporting Iraq I have therefore decided to hasten developments in the Middle East by supporting Iraq … and I order the follows for the support of Iraq:

1- The dispatch of a military mission whose duties will be as follows
   a- To advise and support the armed forced of Iraq.
   b- Where possible to establish military liaison with anti-British forces outside Iraq as well.
   c- To obtain experience and information concerning this area for the German Armed Forces.
2- Assistance by the *Luftwaffe*. *Luftwaffe* will be employed in limited numbers. In addition to purely operational duties, its task will be to strengthen the self-confidence and the will to resist of the armed forces and the people of Iraq.
3- Deliveries of arms. The Chief of the OKW will issue the necessary orders regarding deliveries from Germany and Syria on the basis of the negotiations concluded with the French.
4- Propaganda in the Middle East will be directed by the German Foreign Ministry in cooperation with OKW operations Branch, Propaganda Section. It will be based on the following fundamental idea:
   Victory by the Axis powers will liberate the lands of the Middle East from the British yoke and give them the right of self-determination. Let those who love liberty join the anti-British front.
   There will be no propaganda against the French position in Syria.

But Hitler's support was too late, on May 30 the British reached Baghdad and on the same day Dentz telegraphed to Darlan: "the resistance in Iraq has ended. It is essential to avoid a similar error in Syria. The presence of German units in Syria can only serve as a pretext for an attack. I ask you to put an end to the existing missions to all transit or landings by German planes."[1] On the following day (May 31) Baghdad surrendered without resisting and although the Iraqi army far outnumbered the British forces.[2] Consequently all members of the government and army commanders besides Mufti Al-Husayni left the capital heading to Iran, except for Muhammad Yunus al-Sabawi, the Minister of Economy, who refused to leave and declared himself a military ruler. He distributed arms to the youth brigades and dug trenches around Baghdad to resist the "British occupiers, but he was convinced hours later that there was no benefit to be desired from the resistance which prompted him to leave Baghdad and join his companions and colleagues. This led to the collapse of the resistance and to negotiations and an armistice between the British and the Committee of Internal Security, which was formed by Al-Kilani before he left Iraq, to stop the fighting, return to the terms of the 1930 treaty, arrest the nationals and soldiers of the axis countries, and the deployment of the British forces on the territories of Iraq as required by the circumstances of the wars besides the return of the regent to power in Baghdad. Among those who left Baghdad were some Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese who decided to travel to north Iraq and from there to Syria.[3] And thus the war in Iraq was over in favor of Britain.[4]

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[1] Cox, p. 447.

[2] Hirszowicz, p. 168.

[3] Haddad, p. 126.

[4] Najla'a Samir Awwad, *Thawrat Rashid Aali al-Kilani fi al-Iraq aam 1941* [The revolution of Rahsid Aali Al-Kilani in Iraq in 1941] (Baghdad: Ibn Rushd College of Education, University of Baghdad, Department of History, 2018), p. [4], and Khadduri, p. 227.

On the same day Baghdad surrendered (May 31), Wilhelm Keitel, the Chief of the OKW, telegrammed Rhan the following message: "The Iraq resistance to England has been abandoned, all German forces are to gather at Aleppo. Complete reserve is to be exercised until further intentions have been clarified with the French government in Vichy. Remove Iraq insignia. Further orders will follow."[1] On the same day also, Guérard addressed the following telegram to Darlan: "The collapse of Iraq may have the following consequences:

1- Combined English attacks from south and east.
2- Turkish reaction aiming for the protection of certain zones near Aleppo and along the railroad.
3- Internal de Gaullist revolt against which preventive measures have to be taken at once.
4- German-French military collaboration which should be studied under the following aspects;
   a- General policy
   b- Technical possibility of a large-scale operation of assistance which alone would be effective.
   c- Moral reaction of the French troops."[2]

The failure in Iraq urged the Germans to be cautious about becoming involved in the Levant. Consequently, they started to pursue absolute restraint and their planes in the Levant were ordered by von Ribbentrop to refrain from attacking British troops,[3] and German officers wore civilian clothes in the streets of Beirut.[4] These developments took place after the closure of the

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 577, p. 933.
[2] Ibid, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 252.
[3] Cox, p. 447.
[4] Hirszowicz, p. 175.

Palestinian borders on May 24 besides the cessation of the telegraphic communication across them.[1]

After the collapse of the coup in Iraq, the Vichy government realized that its assistance and aid to the Axis powers would trigger British anger, and thus in a letter to Abetz on June 1st, Darlan wrote: "The reports which I have received from Syria since Iraq sued for an armistice cause me to fear the possibility of an English attack against the Levant countries and in any case an intensification of de Gaullist activity and of English propaganda in these countries. I have issued formal instructions to the High Commissioner to combat that propaganda most vigorously and to defend the Levant countries at any cost such an attack if it should materialize. In order to deprive such an attack in advance of any pretext, it is of the greatest importance that German aircraft and German personnel returning from Iraq not stay in Syria. I would therefore urgently request you to intervene with the German High Command with a view to ordering the evacuation of personnel and of German and Italian air force material sent to the Levant since 9 May."[2]

On June 5, British planes bombarded the oil petrol tanks of "Shell" company in Beirut and set fire in them,[3] and on the next day the Vichists retaliated with an air raid on Amman the capital of Transjordan,[4] but the Vichists denied that they did so.[5] In the meantime, the British fleet was also said to be moving off the

[1] Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, p. 309.
[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 581, p. 936.
[3] Munir Khoury, *Saida abr hiqab Al-Tarikh* [Sidon throughout history] (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Tijari, 1966), p. 335.
[4] Wilbur W. White, "Britains's conquest of Syria", *Current History,* 1 (Sept 1941), p. 30.
[5] *Al-Nahar* (Beirut), June 7, 1941

Syrian coast perhaps in part because of a rumor that eight German submarines had been recently been based at Beirut.[1]

On the other hand, Dentz officially informed on June 6, the United States Consul-General at Beirut who was representing the British interests that the last of the Germans had left.[2] But it was too late, and it was no longer that June 8 that the British and the Free French launched *Exporter*, the code name for "re-invading"[3] the Levant which brought back this area to the Allied domination and in particular the French.

[1] White, p. 30.

[2] Kirk, p. 97.

[3] The first time was in 1918 at the close of the First World War when Britain and France ousted the Ottomans from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Iraq.

Chapter 5

Operation Exporter

and

The end of the Nazis in the Levant

"*Operation Exporter*" or the Allied (British, Australian, Free French) invasion of the French mandate Levant states under Vichy France started on June 8 and ended on July 12. On July 14 an armistice was signed in Acre (Akka) in Palestine which ceased the hostilities between the Allies and the Vichy French. No more undesired campaign has ever been fought by a British Army than one directed against the allies of yesterday and later they sided with the enemy.[1]

Plans to capture Syria and Lebanon by the Allies can be traced back to September 1940 when Churchill and Catroux set up a secret plan to trigger a revolt or a coup in the French mandate Levant by pro-Free French elements at the same time when Catroux, who was supposed to be in Palestine, would receive an appeal from these elements to cross the borders. The British chiefs of staff welcomed the idea of a spontaneous coup by the Free French, but they did not encourage this plan because if it was unsuccessful it might make the Vichy French in the Levant more hostile and this might lead to a Syrian natives rising since there were no British forces to spare for any commitment in Syria as

[1] Longrigg, p. 311.

Wavell,[1] (see photo No. 10 in Appendix 1) the British commander in chief for the Middle East, had pointed out.[2] Nevertheless, this plan was revealed and had eventually failed.

Catroux wrote to de Gaulle on December 8, 1940 that: "Syria is a bitter fruit which continues unwilling to ripe and I am afraid we may only be able to get it by force. We have partisans there whose patience and zeal we are fostering, but we haven't the vanguards of the mechanized units… We must wait. It is clear however; that if Syria were in danger of falling into enemy hands, it would be indispensable to march in with our Egyptian Battalion, such British troops as were available and added support from insurrection."[3]

Later during the spring of 1941 the Axis scored military success in the Balkans and Cyrenaica let alone the suppression of the anti-British coup of Al-Kilani in Iraq, and yet the Levant did not have priority in the British military plans. But that was not the case with the Free French. On April 1st de Gaulle arrived in Cairo for consultation with Catroux about regaining the Levant. Both agreed on this idea but when regarding the means of realizing it showed suspicion of British designs upon the mandate in the Levant. Such was the legacy of the bitter conflict over spheres of influence in the Middle East which had characterized the Anglo-French relations in the aftermath of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.[4] Hence, de Gaulle was engaged in seizing the opportunity to realize his scheme.

At an Anglo-French conference in Cairo on April 15, de Gaulle announced his plan to invade the French mandate Levant with the

[1] Archibald Percival Wavell, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in the Middle East and a British field marshal and government administrator whose victories against the Italians in North Africa during the early part of World War II were offset by his inability to defeat the German *Afrika Korps* under General Erwin Rommel (1941).
[2] Playfair, p, 199.
[3] De Gaulle, v.1, p. 112.
[4] Warner, p. 122.

sole Free French Division. After two days Catroux worked on a campaign which was the basis for the plan de Gaulle sent to Catroux later on April 25. This plan had the code name *Operation Georges* in which Beirut and Damascus would be captured with a military force capable of assuring there the authority of the High Commissioner of Free France; at the same time the airfield at Riyaq must be taken over to prevent any serious air reaction from the Vichy side and to make sure of a base for the aircraft of the Free French. De Gaulle anticipated that the sudden appearance of the Free French forces in Damascus and then in Beirut would cause a psychological shock which would bring about in the face of the German threat the rallying of the Army of the Levant (*L'armée du Levant*) to de Gaulle.[1] According to this plan the material intended for the Free French coming from Britain would include the means for motorization of two battalions as well as 32 tanks and 34 armored cars, and with respect to air forces, the Free French Forces would only have 15 bombing or reconnaissance aircraft and therefore it is necessary for the RAF to give help on a large scale. In this letter de Gaulle asked Catroux to notify the British authorities that their answer on the principle of this operation be given as soon as possible.[2] Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State at the British Foreign Office, expressed his consent provided there would be a guarantee of success; but the British chiefs of staff refused the plan mainly Wavell who stated that he did not have the sufficient tanks or the aircraft to support the Free French, and if he did he would be using them elsewhere .[3]

The Levant persisted to be one of the worrying concerns for the Free French who were aware of the consequences of any German airborne assault upon the Levant. On May 2 Catroux telegrammed

[1] De Wailly, p. 78.

[2] De Gaulle, v.1, pp. 136-139

[3] Warner, p. 123 and de Wailly pp. 78-79.

de Gaulle that the British drew the attention of Dentz to the menace represented for Syria by the concentration of German aircraft in the Greek Island of Leros and asked him what he would do in the case of an attempt landing. Catroux continued that if this attack occurred and Dentz resisted, the latter would be assured that his position and powers are confirmed, and if he refused this deal then Catroux would obtain at least an agreement on cooperation with him; on the other hand if Dentz did not resist but withdrew his forces into Lebanon leaving Syria to the Germans, then Catroux will set a plan to enter Syria with any available means with British support and then rally as many Vichy troops as possible there.[1] This plan like all the others required British logistical and air support. Miles Lampson the British Ambassador in Cairo, and Air Marshal Arthur Tedder the RAF commander were with Catroux's plan but Wavell had opposite point arguing that he did not have enough troops to spare especially if he was required to send a force to Iraq.[2]

Churchill remained convinced that the Axis still contemplate a move to seize the Levant and believed that Catroux's Free French forces with RAF support might be equal to the Syrian problem, but Wavell did not agree with Churchill,[3] and remained adamant that intervention in the Levant meant dispersal of efforts and later a defeat.[4]

On May 16 the British knew that some Turkish troops were moving towards the north Syrian frontiers. British chiefs of staff thought by cooperating with Turkey Britain might prevent the Germans from attaining complete control over Syria. So, they instructed the commanders-in-chief to "improvise" the largest

[1] De Gaulle, v.1, p. 140.
[2] Warner, p. 128.
[3] Melka, p. 324.
[4] Evans, v.1, pp. 51-51.

force they could without jeopardizing the security of the Libyan front, to be ready to move into Syria and Lebanon at the earliest possible date in a military campaign called later: *Operation Exporter*. Accordingly, arrangements were made and plans were drawn to prepare a force for Syria and Lebanon to encounter the Germans in accordance with the chiefs of staff's instructions without endangering the front of North Africa in Libya. In this context and according to the scheme of the British, a plan was drawn in which the 7th Australian Division[1] was ordered to leave Tobruk[2] and move to Palestine to be replaced by South African troops[3] and the Polish Brigade. Plans were prepared with primary objectives at the airfields of Damascus, Beirut and Riyaq, and the troops would include Free French with British leadership,[4] sustained by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force (RAF).

These military arrangements obliged Wavell to do as Catroux wished, but Wavell refused to be dictated by Catroux and de Gaulle in respect of action that would be bound to have serious effect upon the military situation in the Middle East.[5] Finally after serious disagreements between Churchill and Wavell in which the

[1] After Great Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, Australia raised a volunteer force, the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF), and sent the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions of the AIF overseas to support Britain. During the years 1939-1941, Australian soldiers, sailors and airmen fought the Germans, Italians and Vichy French in Europe, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Greece, Crete and the Mediterranean. (Source: Australian Government. Department of Veterans' Affairs. *Anzac Portal, Australia and the Second World War Australia at War, 3 September 1939.* https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/world-war-ii-1939-1945/australia-and-second-world-war

[2] A coastal city in east Libya, lies approximately 150 km (93 mi) away from the Egyptian borders.

[3] On September 6, 1939, the Union of South Africa declared war on Germany, and South African army participated with other British Empire forces in battles in North Africa against Erwin Rommel and his *Afrika Korps*, also many South African pilots joined the Royal Air Force and fought against the Axis powers in the European theatre.

[4] Playfair, p. 202.

[5] ibid, p. 202.

latter expressed his willingness to resign and the former his readiness to accept the resignation,[1] Wavell set preparation schemes for *Operation Exporter*.

On May 25 the outline plan for *Operation Exporter* was sent to London. But soon it was revealed that the troops necessary to occupy Syria and Lebanon were insufficient since these troops might reach Damascus, Beirut and Riyaq and make raids on Tripoli and Homs while the Germans might move from Aleppo and Mosul southward. So Wavell suggested that the Turks might be asked whether they could occupy the airfields in northern Syria in case the British were obliged to occupy those in the South.[2] But on June 2 the Turkish government refused his request. To skip the exclusion of Turkish troops, the British later increased the assigned troops for the operation to include Indian troops and a commando available at Cyprus for making landings from the sea because Syria at that time was of far greater importance for them than Cyprus for the British military.[3]

Yet, "the Allied forces that would invaded the French mandate Levant were not numerically superior to Vichy's. Their supremacy rather lay in artillery and armor. The vanguard of the Allied units was composed of elements of the 7th Australian Division and the 5th Indian Brigade besides around 6,000 Free French soldiers.[4] The Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Royal Navy stood by to assist,"[5] the Royal Navy had 2 cruisers and 10 destroyers off the coast of Lebanon and the RAF had about 70 aircraft,[6] all were led

[1] Melka, p. 324.
[2] Playfair, p. 203
[3] ibid, p. 204.
[4] Playfair does not mention the number of soldiers but describes the Free French military participation as "A weak Free French force." (p. 204).
[5] N. E. Bou-Nacklie "The 1941 invasion of Syria and Lebanon: The role of the local paramilitary." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Jul., 1994), p. 515.
[6] Buckley, p. 53.

by the British General Henry Maitland Wilson. According to Rahn the British troops were composed of "English, Australians, New Zealanders, Hindu [Indians] and native troops numerically far superior to the Army of the Levant and equipped with an overwhelming amount of material especially of motorized arms, fought badly, the English command was obviously inferior to the French."[1] On the other hand, the Vichy forces in the Levant totaled around 35000 men, about 8000 were French while the rest were Senegalese and locally recruited Syrians, Lebanese and Circassians,[2] with 120 guns, 90 tanks, 90 aircraft with 2 destroyers and 3 submarines in Lebanese waters.[3]

To justify the British fears that the Germans were preparing to seize the Levant and to explain the inevitability of the Allied attack, a flood of alarming false news and exaggerated reports spread weeks before June 8 in the press and broadcasts of London, New York, Ankara and Sydney portraying the explicit and implicit military preparations and camouflage activities of the Germans to launch an attack against Syria and Lebanon.[4] Although these fake news were sustained by the factual British withdrawal from Crete on June 1st which put Damascus airfield for the landing of the *Luftwaffe* nearer to the Suez Canal, the Nazi danger came to nothing, the Germans decided to withdraw from Syria in order to give the British no pretext for moving in, and this step was taken due to the Nazi engagement in the military campaign against the Soviet Union (which had the code name *Operation Barbarossa*)[5]

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 253.
[2] Buckley, p. 53.
[3] Longrigg, p. 208.
[4] These fake news and reports are mentioned in de Wailly's book, pp. 148-150 and Melka, pp. 311-312.
[5] Playfiar, p. 205.

and to the fall of Al-Kilani in Iraq.[1] However, in German circles, a Nazi landing in Syria was totally outside German thinking. In an important survey following interviews of the major German generals carried out by Liddel Hart after the war titled *The other side of the Hill* (1948): Syria was not mentioned once.[2]

What were the reasons behind the Allies offensive of June 1941?

First reason was the demise of the neutrality of the French Levant through the use of Syrian and Lebanese territories and air space by the Nazi Germans to assist the anti-British coup of Al-Kilani in Iraq, and thus Germany would get a grip on the Middle East. On June 7, Churchill told the American president Franklin Roosevelt that: "We enter Syria in some force tomorrow in order to prevent further German penetration."[3] The active cooperation of the Vichy authorities in the Levant with the Germans to assist Al-Kilani and the active steps Britain had taken to oppose the German infiltration meant that there was no longer any "if" about the likelihood of British intervention in Syria and the Lebanon; the only questions remained to be settled were "how?" and "when?"[4] According to Playfair: "[The British] had stopped the Germans and the Italians from intervening effectively in Iraq because [the British] had acted quickly and [the Germans and the Italians] had been unready. But in the process [the Germans and the Italians] had used Syria… they were clearly better able to establish themselves in that country than in Iraq. Syria therefore, which had been an uncertain and somewhat sinister neighbor since the fall of France, began to present a definite threat to [the British] position in the Middle East. Thus the crisis in Iraq was no sooner past than maters came to a

[1] For the reaction of the Germans after Al-Kilani's fiasco see: Cox, p. 447; *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 252; *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 577, p. 933.
[2] De Wailly, p. 117
[3] Churchill, v. III, p. 294.
[4] Evans, v.1, p. 49.

head in Syria."[1] Buckley also sees a nuance link between the use of the Levantine airfield by the *Luftwaffe* and the Allied attack,[2] so he wrote: "While it was the use of the Syrian aerodromes by German aircrafts that precipitated the British and Free French action against Syria in the month of June, the necessity for an operation of this nature had been urged by de Gaulle and Catroux on behalf of the Free French some weeks earlier."[3] On the other hand, the British government announced on June 8, the day the operation was launched, that in spite of its clear warning of July 1, 1940[4] the Vichy Government in pursuance of its policy of collaboration with the Axis Powers has placed the air bases in Syria and Lebanon at the disposal of Germany and Italy and has supplied war material to the rebels forces in Iraq, German infiltration into the Levant had begun and the Vichy Government is continuing to bring Syria and Lebanon under full German control.[5]

Second reason was the Axis success in in the Eastern Mediterranean mainly in Balkans and Crete during the spring of 1941 which made the Allies to perceive that the next step might be in the Levant and this would have serious consequences on the Allied presence and interests in the Middle East. The Levant was thus on the front stage and German aircraft at Damascus would be nearer to the Suez Canal than if they were at Libyan-Egyptian borders while the Vichy forces seemed to support the Germans completely.[6] In this context Churchill wrote: "As the hopes of holding Crete diminished, the possible German threat to Syria

[1] Playfair, p. 197.

[2] Lipschits, p. 97.

[3] Buckley, p. 43.

[4] In which it warned the French authorities in the Levant against any attempt to undermine the interests of Britain and the countries she pledged to defend in the Middle East.

[5] *Times,* June 9, 1941.

[6] De Wailly, p. 117. and Playfair, p. 205.

commanded increasing intention."[1] On June 3, Churchill sent a telegram to Wavell stating that: "There is a storm of criticism about Crete, and I am being pressed for explanations on many points. Do not worry about this at all now. Simply keep your eye on Syria and above all *Battleaxe*[2]."[3]

Third reason was Pétain's pro-German action which threatened Allied sources of oil and the Soviet southern flank. Fourth reason, with Germany dominant in Europe, any victory would be essential to the British for psychological and propaganda reasons.[4]

Besides these reasons there was a fundamental concern for the Free French and de Gaulle in particular, and that was the loss of the whole French position in the Levant as a result of the Vichy policy. Dentz was already in deep trouble with the resurgent nationalist, worse still the Vichy government seemed to be allowing the Germans freely to confront Arab leader with the humiliating paradox to be ruled by a defeated France which would lead to the eviction of France from the Levant. And thus "de Gaulle longed to reach Beirut and Damascus, stop the rot, patch up the French image and reassert France's historic mission in the Levant."[5]

A deep look at these reasons depicts that they appear mostly to be British and Free French concerns and have no relation with the worries of the Levantines in Syria and Lebanon whom main anxiety was to obtain independence and get their states free of foreign troops. Furthermore, the British and the French set up plans to invade the French mandate states without the participation or even consultation of the governments of these states, and the main absentee was the people of these states.

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[1] Churchill, v. III, p. 291.

[2] It is the code name for the British military operations in Libya.

[3] Churchill, v. III, p. 293.

[4] Bou-Nacklie, p. 515.

[5] Gaunson, p. 29.

On Sunday June 8 at 2 o'clock before dawn in bright moonlight,[1] the Allied forces crossed the borders from Palestine and Transjordan into Syria and Lebanon inaugurating *Operation Exporter*. This attack was launched on a broad form: columns of the 7th Australian Division took the coastal road from Ras al-Naqura on the Palestinian-Lebanese borders with Beirut and Tripoli as their goals, while other elements of this column made a thrust from the upper Jordan valley into the town of Marjayoun into the Beqa' valley with intention to moving eastward towards Damascus.[2] On the other hand, the 5th Indian Brigade, British, the Free French and Arab forces attacked from Transjordan the rail junction of the Syrian town of Daraa[3] and advanced towards Damascus.[4] (See *Map – 10* in Appendix 4)

Catroux, who assumed the powers, responsibilities and duties of France's representative in the Levant,[5] informed during the first day of the attack in leaflets and broadcasts the peoples of Syria and Lebanon that in the name of General de Gaulle and the Free French he had come to put an end to the mandate and to proclaim them free and independent. "A statement by the British ambassador in Cairo was also issued associating the [British] government with this assurance."[6] According to Rahn these leaflets circulated by the Free French and the British were expected to be received with open arms by the Vichy Army and the population of the Levant, instead of this they encountered later a foe who was fighting more

[1] Buckley, p. 56.

[2] The vast majority of the Australian involvement actually occurred in modern-day Lebanon. [Source: Daniel Seaton, *Fighting against the French: Australians in the Allied invasion of Lebanon and Syria, 1941* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial), https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/fightingagainstthefrench.pdf

[3] Lies close to the Transjordanian borders

[4] Bou-Nacklie, pp. 515-516; Buckley, p. 56; Kirk, p. 98; Playfair, p. 207.

[5] Warner, p. 140.

[6] Playfair, v.2, p. 207.

doggedly every day and was causing them heavy losses of men and material.[1] On the other hand, according to the Arab historian Salah Al-Aqqad, these announcements and statements did not have remarkable impact in Syria and Lebanon where most of the people took indifferent stand although the merchants and landlords welcomed the Allied occupation hoping it would re-open the markets of the neighboring countries.[2]

As mentioned above, the British government announced on the same day of the outbreak of hostilities that His Majesty's Government could not tolerate the collaboration of the Vichy Government with the Axis powers which led to German infiltration into the Levant, so the Free French troops with the support of the Imperial forces had entered Syria and Lebanon. The Vichy government also delivered political statement on that same day and sent a note to the United States ambassador in which it denied any significant collaboration with the Germans; according to this note: "There has not been collaboration between the [Vichy] French and the Germans in Syria, and all German air material and personnel which might have been there during the events in Iraq have been withdrawn with the exception of two or three damaged machines and about ten men. The [Vichy French] Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like to draw the attention of the United States ambassador that any British attack, which nothing in the present situation in Syria can explain, risks producing the gravest consequences… The [Vichy] French government is determined to defend its territory and possessions wherever they may be attacked and by all the means at its disposal."[3] On the other hand, the Nazis declared on June 8 that they could not in any case provide the Vichy French with real military help in the Levant through

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 253.
[2] Al-Aqqad, p, 103.
[3] Lipschits, p. 112 and Kirk, p. 97.

commitment of German forces, because an insufficient or merely symbolic commitment of such forces would negative consequences the political situation of France more than it would help.[1] Yet, on the day of the Allied attack, June 8, Dentz asked Rahn to pass on his request that the port of Haifa and British naval units off the coast of the Levant be attacked by German planes since the British warships were operating in support of the Australian troops advancing north along the coastal road from Palestine and were effectively battering the French defenders. However, Dentz was always careful to point out that he did not want to put Levant air bases at the *Luftwaffe's* disposal.[2] On the same day also, Abetz, the German ambassador in Paris, reported that Darlan did not want to appeal for German assistance at this time in order to show that the British attack lacked any pretext.[3]

On the next day of the attack Dentz sent the following telegram to the Vichy government: "This morning General de Giorgis [the chairman of the Italian Armistice Commission] suggested Italian air intervention in Palestine and he wanted my opinion, I replied that Italian air force could attack Britain anywhere provided it does not use Syrian airfields."[4] But later, the Vichy French had an explicit and elaborate attitude regarding military assistance from the Axis. Abetz wrote in a telegram dated June 11 dispatched to the Foreign Ministry that the Vichy French government had requested very urgently military relief through German air attacks on Haifa and bombing the British fleet cruising off the Syro-Lebanese coast. He continued that the government asked the

[1] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 606, p. 984.
[2] Melka, pp. 327-328.
[3] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 616, p. 1009, footnote no. 5.
[4] Lipschits, p. 197 footnote no. 43.

German to put pressure on Ankara to permit the passage of military supply transportation across Turkish territories.[1]

The request by the Vichy government for air attacks on Haifa coincided with the German aerial war strategy in the eastern Mediterranean during the months of May and June 1941 where the Nazis concentrated their attacks on Egypt and against Haifa with its naval base and oil refineries[2] following their success in Greece and Libya, furthermore; the Allied invasion of Syria on June 8 gave the *Luftwaffe* a further reason to bombard Palestine.[3]

On the other hand, the Vichy Minister of War General Huntziger set out in a telegram to Dentz on June 11 his government's position quite clearly, he wrote: "

a- For moral reasons German intervention will have to take place from outside and without flying over the Levant.
b- [Bombing] British fleet supporting the land attack off the Lebanese coast is the most interesting target for us at the moment.
c- Other important targets are the airfields at Amman, Haifa and Lydda as well as the Haifa port installations. Other possible target is the British convoys from Haifa to Cyprus.
d- As for intervention in actual combat zone, this will be possible only on indications from General Dentz to be forwarded through the Italian Armistice Commission.

German Armistice Commission has moreover requested guarantees of security from German aircraft in respect of ground defence besides the assistance of French fighters in

[1] Ibid, pp. 1009-1010.
[2] Nir Arielli, "Haifa is still Burning: Italian, German and French air raids on Palestine during the Second World War", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46:3, May 2010, p. 339. DOI: 10.1080/00263200903068565
[3] Ibid, p. 339.

> case of landing. We have replied that General Dentz would give guarantees and aid in exceptional cases, forced flights over Syrian territories or landing."[1]

Vichy government and its representatives in the Levant were reluctant to approve German landing in this French mandate region because they worried that this might appear as direct Nazi military intervention in Syria and Lebanon, and this would have a negative effect on the French soldiers and officers and on the chances of understanding with Britain on the Levant. Furthermore; the Vichy French sought to avoid any tension with the United States which openly declared that it considered fighting the British in the Levant would serve Hitler. Pétain's government was very much concerned with the reaction of the United States who sent food and other essential goods to France and her African possessions.[2]

Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, Rahn was ordered by the Foreign Ministry not to leave but to have everything ready for his personal departure.[3] Soon he was involved in the departure of the German community and the pro-German personalities that had in the past cooperated with the Axis powers, and he continued to organize Arab resistance.[4] While Fawzi Al-Qawuqji[5] who headed a group of some 500 men to confront the Allied forces in Homs and Palmyra, Sheikh Shammar, a Bedouin leader who had previous contacts with German officials in Baghdad promised between 500

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[1] Lipschits, p. 197 and Kirk, p. 98 and Warner, pp. 143-144.

[2] Hirszovicz, pp. 178-179.

[3] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XII, No. 606, p. 984.

[4] ibid, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 254 and Nordbruch, p. 101.

[5] An Arab military nationalist, born in Tripoli, Lebanon in 1890, he fought with the Ottoman army and later after in 1918 with several Arab armies and resistance movements such as the Arab Revolt against the French in 1925. In 1947 he organized the "Salvation Army" which fought the Zionist in 1948 and after the signing of the Armistice between the Arabs and Israel in 1949, he left the military life. He died in Beirut in 1977.

to 1000 fighters to be deployed alongside Syria's north-east borders. Moreover; German efforts were made to encourage Druzes, Kurds and Assyrians to join the resistance groups.[1]

On the ground, Tyre fell on June 8 in the afternoon and on the next day fierce fighting occurred on the coastal sector at the Litani River.[2] Progress thereafter was slow but steady, with Sidon being occupied on June 15. On the central route, the town of Marjayoun was captured on June 11. Precipitous terrain made a rapid advance a doubtful prospect, and on June 12 it was decided to transfer the bulk of the forces there to take part in the coastal advance, via a mountainside route that passed through the town of Jezzine. The most rapid progress was made by the Indians and Free French towards Damascus.[3] (See *Map – 11* in Appendix 4)

On the German side, the first major German air raid against Palestine took place on the night between 9 and 10 June. Some 20 German aircraft took off from Rhodes and attacked Haifa, most of the bombs they dropped fell on the harbor area,[4] and the *Luftwaffe* bombarded the port and the ammunition dumps as well as the oil tanks.[5] the Germans declared that this raid is the beginning of further attacks against the most important British provision centers on the Mediterranean.[6] On 11 June British authorities published a war communiqué claiming that the attack against Haifa on the night of 9–10 June was carried out by aircraft coming from the 'German-controlled base at Aleppo' in Syria. It went on to say that the RAF and Australian Air Force's retaliation 'was prompt', bombing the target before the last enemy aircraft had time to return

[1] Nordbruch, p. 101.
[2] James, p. 141
[3] Australian War Memorial, *Syrian Campaign*, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84669
[4] Arielli, p. 339.
[5] *Al-Nahar*, June 12, 1941
[6] Ibid.

there. According to Arielli[1] this announcement was probably part of the British effort to legitimize the conquest of Syria although the Vichy French authorities adamantly refused to allow the Germans to use airfields in the Levant and consequently the *Luftwaffe* used Rhodes and bases in Greece for this purpose.[2]

Yet, Vichy French naval commander in the Levant Admiral Pierre Goutton[3], who had few forces to use against the British warships was therefore eager for German support, and thus he gratefully accepted a German proposal to mine the coastal waters, but the mines produced no results, and as was later discovered, had not been properly armed.[4] On the other hand, Goutton sent on June 12 a telegram requesting his government to authorize *Stukas*[5] to use Levantine airfields to relieve the Vichy forces from the shelling of the British Navy. He concluded his telegram: "General Dentz has agreed today and made contacts with Rahn on this point. I request very speedy and sustained action."[6] Dentz confirmed the situation on the same day to his government in a telegram, and added that he has changed his views concerning the intervention of the German aircraft and consequently he requested a permission for a squadron of German aircraft to use Aleppo airfield to intervene against British Navy or land operations. He ended his telegram: "[I] have informed Rahn".[7] On the morning of the next day Vichy government replied: "We are dispatching a [French] air squadron qualified for attack of fleet. Help of *Stukas*, which could have

[1] Arielli, p. 341.

[2] Later, the Germans carried out air raids on Haifa on June 11, 12, 13, 14, 25 and July 3 without using the airfields in the Levant. [Source: Arielli, p. 335].

[3] Some sources write it as "Gouton."

[4] Melka, p. 327.

[5] A German dive bomber and ground-attack aircraft.

[6] Kirk, p. 99 and Lipschits, p. 122 [Kirk mentions the date of this telegram: At 1.5 pm on June 12, while Lipschits June 11].

[7] Kirk, p. 99.

severe repercussions on general policy, must be sought only if it is not merely speedy and sustained but also massive. Ascertain whether these technical conditions could be fulfilled."[1] Following this reply, Dentz revealed in his answer to this government a different attitude regarding the German intervention and the intentions of the Germans in the Levant[2] saying the following: "Despatch of the specialized squadron will relieve me and may enable me to solve the problem with my own resources. Massive and sustained support would involve placing at my disposal of German air force defensive material or airfield services which I cannot supply. The Germans would thus be led to occupy the whole of north Syria."[3]

Rahn from his side pointed out to the German military operations in assisting the Vichy French in the Syria and Lebanon without using the airfields there. In a memorandum about his mission in the Levant sent to Germany on July 30, 1941, he wrote the followings: "the attack of two German *Stukas* formations was enough to scatter the British fleet and force it to observe the utmost caution… The spirited attack of the two small French destroyers on the far superior British naval force which led to the loss of an English torpedo boat played its part in admonishing the British to observe caution. An English counteraction which continued at night right in the Bay of Beirut was unsuccessful and not repeated."[4] He continued: "On June 11 it was reported that Fawzi Al-Qawuqji,

[1] ibid, p. 99.

[2] In his trial after the war, Dentz claimed that he adopted his government's attitude and consequently he expressed its concern about German occupation of French territories and thus he said: "It was said that I had defended Syria for Hitler. It's not true. I have defended in Syria France and North Africa against a German influence". [Source: Lipschits, p. 134.].

[3] Kirk, p. 99.

[4] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 254

following our suggestion, had attacked the pipeline station H-1[1] in Iraqi territory, and, for lack of dynamite had dismantled the pump, H-2 had also been set afire by Bedouins friendly to us and had burnt out completely. At the same time 12000 hectoliters of fuel oil had been destroyed."[2]

In accordance with his policy of strengthening the material and psychological resistance of the Vichy French in the Levant,[3] Rahn wired to Berlin on June 13 suggesting the purchase large quantities of scrap rubber, wool and wire from the Levant and sending them to Germany through Turkey. Following the prompt reply of Berlin, the business seemed to get off to a good start, but it started to slow down because merchants in the Levant, in expectation of a British victory and consequently the inclusion of Syria and Lebanon in the Sterling bloc, were requesting cash payments. The officials in Berlin, however, haggled about the prices and payment until most of the goods remained in the Levant and fell into the hands of the British.[4]

On June 14 the *Luftwaffe* attacked two British destroyers off coast Beirut,[5] while Vichy forces launched a counterattack that struck at the lines of communication of both the Australians and the Indians besides Free French force before Damascus. They recaptured the towns of Ezraa, Quneitra (in Syria) and Marjayoun (in Lebanon), but by 18 June the situation had been restored, with all but Marjayoun back in Allied hands. The Allied emphasis then

[1] The first station on the Kirkuk–Haifa crude oil pipeline (also known as the Iraq–Haifa pipeline or Mediterranean pipeline) starting at the oil fields in Kirkuk (north Iraq) through Transjordan to Haifa in Palestine, and thus the letter H refers to Haifa.
[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, pp. 254-255.
[3] Melka, p. 312.
[4] Ibid, p. 313, and *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, pp. 256-257.
[5] *Al-Nahar,* June 17, 1941.

switched to the capture of Damascus, which fell on June 21,[1] Catroux entered the city and de Gaulle followed him on the 23rd. During the night of that day, Damascus was bombarded by the *Luftwaffe*.[2] On the other hand, a new front was opened on June 21 (the same day Damascus fell) where a mixed force of British troops, including those of the Arab Legion, entered Syria from Iraq advancing from the pumping station H-3, while some troops assembled at T-1[3] to mislead the enemy in believing that an advance would made up from the Euphrates.[4] (See *Map – 12* in Appendix 4)

In the night of June 22 to 23, Dentz summoned Rahn and told him that the situation was hopeless and that collapse was inevitable in 2 or 3 days because between 600 and 800 British armored cars, trucks and tanks had arrived before Palmyra and would very soon be threating Homs, Tripoli and Aleppo. At this point of time, Dentz told Rahn: "The British assert that they attacked Syria [Levant] because of the transit flights of German planes [to Iraq], that is not true, the attack had been prepared long in advance and would have come sooner or later."[5] Few days later, the British attacked Palmyra on 25 June, but the Vichy forces resisted for nine days before surrendering.[6]

In this critical situation Jacques Benoist-Méchin, the Secretary of State of the Vice-President of the Vichy government arrived in

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[1] Australian War Memorial, *Syrian Campaign*, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84669

[2] Lipschits, p. 120.

[3] The first station on the Kirkuk–Tripoli (North Lebanon) crude oil pipeline starting at the oil fields in Kirkuk through Syria to Tripoli, and thus the letter T refers to Tripoli.

[4] Gavin Merrick Long*, Greece, Crete, and Syria, Australia in the war of 1939-1945, v.2* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1953), p. 440.

[5] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, pp. 255-256.

[6] Australian War Memorial, *Syrian Campaign*, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84669

Ankara carrying a personal letter from Pétain to Turkey's president İsmet İnönü to obtain an agreement on the transit of petrol and war material for the Levant army. The Vichy French wanted the Ankara government to return 40 tanks sold by France to Turkey in 1939 which were still unpaid for. Germany was present in this deal through its ambassador von Papen who encouraged Benoist-Méchin to promise the Turks some concessions in North Syria in return for weapons. But Turkey refused to breach its neutrality and consequently none of Vichy French requests were met except the delivery of petrol, and Benoist-Méchin left Ankara on July 2nd.[1] Von Papen assumed that if Dentz would resist in the Levant two more weeks after getting the petrol for the aircraft, German victories in the Soviet Union would cause a change in Turkey's position.[2]

Meanwhile Beirut was submitted to heavy RAF raids mostly during night targeted military centers, ammunition depots, and oil tanks in the Dawra neighborhood (the northern suburb of Beirut), as well as ships docked at the port. The aircraft bombs also hit the *Résidence des Pins*[3] (The Pine Residence), the municipality building, and many houses in different quarters of Beirut. Consequently, most of the residents of Beirut abandoned their homes and left the city for the mountains,[4] mainly the Beirut-Aley road which was crowded with people in cars, on animals, and even on foot. On the other hand, notable personages in the city appealed to Dentz and the consul of the United States to turn Beirut and its

[1] Warner, p. 152 and Hirszowicz, pp. 183-184 and *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, pp. 258-259.

[2] Hirszowicz, p.184.

[3] Was the residence of the French High Commissioners from 1918 to 1941, but Dentz was not in this place during the bombing. (De Wailly, p, 247).

[4] Raed Sami Hamid, "Mawqif Surya wa Lubnan min indilaa al-harb al-alamiya al-thaniya hatta aam 1941" [The stance of Syria and Lebanon from the outbreak of World War II until 1941], *Journal of Surra Man Raa* 2008, Volume 4, Issue 10, p. 137.

surroundings into a neutral zone or an open city in order to avoid losses in the civilian population,[1] but the French High Commissioner refused. Rahn described this Levantine worry and fear in a memorandum sent to Germany on July 30 saying: "I had received the information that the native governments of Syria and Lebanon had asked the High Commissioner [Dentz] in high-flown written statement to cease hostilities and surrender. I had the original of the letter signed by Premier Naqqash (the head of the Lebanese government) which reflected all the pitiful fear of the dangers to life and property. Then two Syrians close to Naqqash came to see me and made the naïve request that I use my influence with the High Commissioner [Dentz] to declare Beirut at least an open city as if it were only a matter of protecting the interests of these Levantine house-owners, I replies to them: I admire the indulgence of the High Commissioner [Dentz], in his place I would have Mr. Nakkash [Naqqash] strung up on the highest cedar of Lebanon."[2]

After the capture of Damascus, the mainly Australian drive on Beirut became the Allied main effort.[3] Pressure was maintained around Jezzine by the 25th Brigade, while the 21st, reinforced by the 17th Brigade from the 6th Division, drove north along the coast. Dentz realized that without reinforcements the resistance cannot last more than one week as the Allied troops have an abundance of rolling stocks as well as superiority in artillery, tanks and machine guns besides continuous supplies and reinforcements.[4] Accordingly, he sent on June 26 two staff officers to Vichy to represent the impossibility of continuing the struggle,

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[1] Anne-Lucie Chaigne-Oudin, "Guerre du Levant 8 juin-11 juillet 1941", *Les Clés du Moyen-Orient*, https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/Guerre-du-Levant-8-juin-11-juillet.html

[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 256.

[3] Australian War Memorial, *Syrian Campaign*, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84669

[4] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 260.

Pétain agreed on the 28th on the necessity of an armistice, while Darlan was for fighting as long as possible.[1] On June 29 Darlan decided to send reinforcements to Dentz and dropped down the conditions of a possible armistice. Accordingly, under the protection of three destroyers two cargo ships, *Oued Yquem* and *Saint Didier,* sailed to Salonika to pick up the reinforcements.[2] But *Saint Didier* which was carrying some 260 Vichy troops, tankers, arms and ammunition tried to make its way from Salonika to the Levant along the Turkish coast to evade interception, was sunk by British aircraft in the Turkish harbor of Antalya on 4-5 July,[3] nine officers and 37 men died while 22 he interned with the survivors in Turkey. *Oued Yquem* took shelter at the island of Kastellorizo[4] which was controlled by the Italians, while the destroyers returned back to Salonika on British orders. [5]

The climactic battle of the campaign was fought to secure the town of Damour[6] between 5 and 9 July (see *Map – 13* in Appendix 4). There was little progress in the western sectors. Attention was then concentrated on the Jezzine and coastal areas. On July 8, Dentz finally received authority to negotiate for an armistice, while Damour, the last position on the coast road covering Beirut was about the fall. The Allied troops continued their advance and British forces headed north to Beirut with the Australians capturing Damour on 9 July (see *Map – 13* in Appendix 4). On 10 July, with the Australians within 10 kilometers of Beirut, the British 4th Cavalry Brigade closing on Homs, and the 10th Indian Division having advanced into northern Syria from Iraq, Dentz sought an

[1] Kirk, p. 101.
[2] De Wailly, p. 258.
[3] Kirk, p. 101.
[4] A Greek island of the Dodecanese in the Eastern Mediterranean It lies roughly 2 kilometers (1 mile) off the south coast of Turkey.
[5] De Wailly, pp. 258-259.
[6] Around 18 km south of Beirut.

armistice.[1] On the same day, Rahn who was in Tripoli received a message from Dentz stating that the British agreed to start the negotiations and the first condition for the cessation of hostilities was the departure of Rahn and his entire staff from the Levant besides the surrender of the Italians. Shortly after midnight Rahn and his group crossed the Syro-Turkish borders with their transmitting equipment.[2]

A ceasefire was arranged to begin at one minute after midnight on 12 July 1941; two days later, the armistice was signed in Acre (Akka) without the participation of the Free French (see the text in Appendix 3).[3] This armistice did not go beyond matters of a purely military matters and the transfer of the Levant administrations.[4]

As for Germany's attitude towards the armistice, Hirszowicz wrote[5]: "Vichy was not hindered by the Germans from concluding the agreement, but its delay in agreeing to the cease fire negotiations must be ascribed to the fear of Berlin's reaction. When asked by Vichy about its opinion on the question of armistice the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Office) warned against British perfidy, but left the final decision to the French. More light on German intentions was thrown by the directions sent to Rahn on the armistice question. He was to limit himself to giving Dentz general advice on two matters: the honor of Rance ... and to avoid any concessions to the Gaullists or their recognition." This could explain why the Free French were not included in the Acre negotiations. During the Allied attack *(Operation Exporter)*, the intervention of German planes was the only direct form of Franco-

[1] Australian War Memorial, *Syrian Campaign*, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84669
[2] *DGFP*, Series D, v. XIII, No. 165, p. 260.
[3] Playfiar, pp. 335-337.
[4] Hirszowicz, p.191.
[5] ibid

German collaboration in the defense of the Levant territories. At the same time, a number of indirect forms of collaboration were explored such as the German release of French war material imposed by the armistice agreements which began in connection with Darlan's concessions in the Iraqi affair, and was accelerated by the invasion of the Levant. In addition to freeing material support for Dentz's troops, the Germans showed a willingness to assist in their reinforcement with personnel from France and elsewhere. German authorities were also persuaded to release some 400 French officers and non-coms[1] from her POW camps for service in the Levant. They also agreed, as mentioned previously, to provide facilities for the transportation of French reinforcements from France to Salonika, and even to provide a naval escort for part of the sea voyage to the Levant. Although the news that these reinforcements were on the way lifted Dentz's spirit for a time, but the ships never arrived due to their navigation over waters controlled by the British fleet which forced them to turn around or be sunk.[2]

With the singing of the armistice, Vichy French soldiers were repatriated while the Nazi Germans and the Italians left Syria and Lebanon. The loss of these two states by the Axis could be attributed to the disinterest of the Nazis in that part of the world and hence they did not strive to regain them, besides Hitler’s decision to invade the Soviet Union during the Allied invasion of the Vichy French Levant.

[1] Non-com is a person, such as a sergeant or corporal, who is appointed from the ranks as a subordinate officer. [Source: Collins English Dictionary].
[2] Melka, pp. 332-333.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Photos (Persons)

Photo No. 1 General Charles de Gaulle broadcasting from the BBC (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appeal_of_18_June)

Photo No. 2 Winston Churchill

(Source: https://d-dayinfo.org/en/blog/winston-churchill/)

Photo No. 3 Georges Catroux

(Source: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Catroux)

Photo No. 4 Henri Dentz

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Dentz)

Photo No. 5 Philippe Pétain (Left) & Henri Dentz (Right)

(Source: http://www.syrianhistory.com/en/photos/5342)

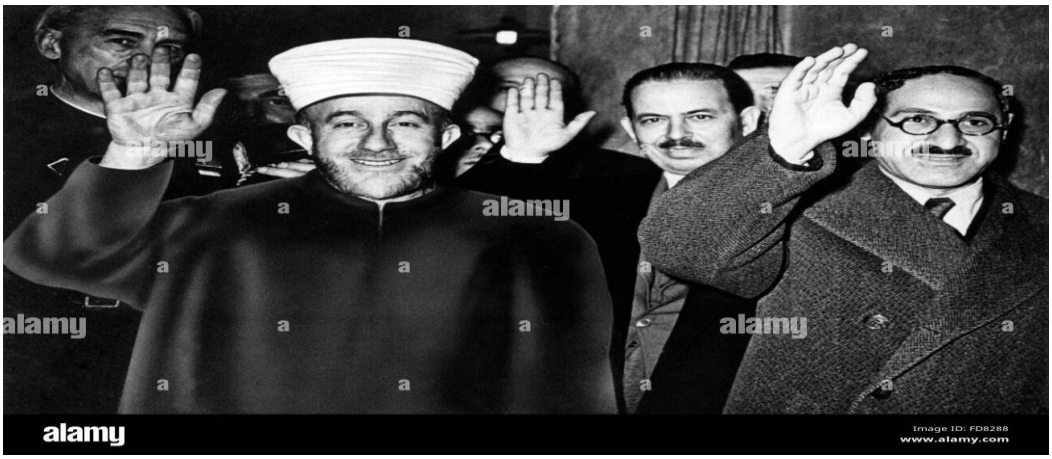


Photo No. 6: Mufti of Jerusalem Amin Al-Husayni (Left) & Rashid Aali Al-Kilani (Right) (Source: (https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-mohammed-amin-al-husseini-and-rashid-ali-al-gaylani-in-berlin-1943-94219784.html)

Photo No.7 Admiral François Darlan

(Source: https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2021/10/15/darlan-le-troisieme-homme-de-vichy-sur-histoire-tv-un-amiral-en-eaux-troubles_6098573_3246.html)

Photo No. 8 Rudolf Rahn

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Rahn)

Photo No. 9 Otto Abetz (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Abetz)

Photo No. 10 Archibald Wavell

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archibald_Wavell,_1st_Earl_Wavell#Others)

Appendix 2

Photos (Buildings)

P – 1 Prussian Deaconesses School in Beirut

(Source: https://dafbeirut.org/en/articles/Fine-Arts-Education-in-Lebanon-Part-1)

P – 2 Hotel Métropole (Source: https://www.goethe.de/ins/lb/en/kul/sup/spu/20950334.html)

P – 3 Hotel Normandy (Source: https://www.pinterest.fr/pin/701154235707719451/)

Appendix 3

APPENDIX 3

Agreement for the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria and the Lebanon

General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.O., General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in Palestine and Syria (acting in the name of the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East)—on the one hand, and

General de Verdilhac, Commander of the Legion of Honour, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the French Troops in Syria, (acting in the name of the French High Command)—on the other hand

have agreed to a Convention which ends hostilities in Syria and the Lebanon, of which the following are the terms:

1. Hostilities ceased on 11th July, 1941, at 2101 hours Greenwich Mean Time.

2. The Allied Forces will occupy Syro-Lebanese territory: the French Forces will be concentrated in certain areas selected by a committee formed of representatives of both parties. This concentration will be completed by Tuesday 15th July, 1941, at 1200 hrs. at which hour Allied Forces will move to occupy certain strategic points. Up to the time of their repatriation the French troops will remain under French Command, with a restricted establishment, which will provide for their maintenance from existing stocks. Special measures are foreseen for the Jebel Druse, where, for security reasons, the French Troops will remain in garrison until relieved by British Troops.

3. In order to ensure public security, the occupation of the principal localities in Syria and Lebanon will be undertaken in accordance with a programme which will allow immediate replacement of French by the occupying forces.

4. Minefields, whether on sea or on land, will be disclosed to the occupying authority.

5. Full honours of war will be granted to the French Forces. The latter will retire to the selected areas with all arms, including guns, machine-guns, tanks and armoured cars, and their ammunition. All measures will be taken by the French command to prevent arms and ammunition being left unguarded on the battlefield or elsewhere. The French military authorities will give every assistance in recovering arms which may be in the hands of the population.

6. In consideration of the honours of war, French officers and non-commissioned officers, and soldiers, are permitted to retain their individual arms (rifles or carbines; revolvers; bayonets; swords or sabres). However the soldiers will not be allowed to carry ammunition. In each unit, for security reasons, a small quantity of ammunition will be retained. The gendarmerie will retain its arms and a limited amount of ammunition. All other war material including guns, coastal batteries, anti-aircraft guns and

military transport will be stocked under British control. The latter will inspect this material and will have the right to take over the material that may be required by them; the remainder will be destroyed by the French authorities under British control.

7. Prisoners of the Allied Forces will be forthwith set free, including those who have been transferred to France. As regards the latter, the British authorities reserve the right to hold as prisoners of war, an equal number of French officers, as far as possible of similar ranks, until those prisoners transferred to France have been released. The French prisoners will be released when the whole of the Syro-Lebanese territory has been occupied and the clauses of this convention fulfilled. They will then be enabled to join their units for repatriation.

8. The alternatives of rallying to the Allied cause or of being repatriated will be left to the free choice of the individual whether military or civil. In the case of civilians who do not rally to the Allied cause, individual applications to remain in Syria or Lebanon will be considered by the British Authorities.

9. Executive officials, officials of the technical services and special service officers will remain at their posts so long as is necessary to ensure the continuance of the administration of the country and until such time as they can be relieved. They can then be repatriated if they so wish. Their services may be dispensed with if their work or attitude is not satisfactory.

10. The British Authorities agree to the repatriation by French ships of French troops and of French subjects, with the reservation that this repatriation will be limited to those who have opted therefor. The British Authorities reserve the right to control all matters relative to the repatriation of these people.

11. Holdings of French subjects to be repatriated will be transferred in accordance with terms to be arranged. These people will receive treatment not less favourable than that accorded to British subjects who have lately left Syria.

12. French cultural institutions, including hospitals, schools, missions, etc., are assured that their rights will be respected. The rights of these institutions must not be allowed to conflict with Allied military interests.

13. All public services, including railways, tramways, public transport, electricity and water, will be maintained in operation and handed over intact.

14. All means of communication, including telephones, telegraphs, wireless and the submarine cable, will be handed over intact to the occupying authorities. The French command will have the use of telegraph facilities with France on the same conditions as the general public.

15. Port installations, naval establishments and all ships—including British—in Syrian and Lebanese territorial waters, will be handed over intact to the occupying authorities.

16. All aircraft and air installations and equipment, in Syria or the Lebanon will be handed over intact. On the signature of the present agreement British aircraft are empowered to use any air base and alighting area in the Lebanon and Syria.

17. Fuel stocks shall be handed over intact. The quantity necessary for military transport will be placed at the disposal of the French Command.

18. Currency and other means of payment in circulation or in reserve, in possession of banks or other public authorities, will be safeguarded.

19. The British Military Authorities reserve the right to take into their service the 'Troupes Spéciales du Levant' progressively as they are discharged by the French authorities. The arms of these troops will be handed over to the British Authorities.

20. The British Authorities will not prosecute in any way native Syrians and Lebanese who have been involved in the recent hostilities in a military or official capacity.

21. The carrying into effect of the terms of this Convention will be controlled and regulated by a 'Commission of Control' which will sit at Beirut and will be composed of five members. Three of the members, including the President, will be nominated by the British Authorities, the remaining two by the French Authorities.

This 'Commission of Control' is empowered to appoint sub-commissions and to co-opt the services of such experts as may be necessary.

22. This Convention is drawn up in English and in French. In case of dispute the English text will be authoritative.

(Signed) H. M. WILSON
General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Allied Forces in Palestine and Syria, (Acting in the name of the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East)

(Signed) DE VERDILHAC
Deputy Commander-in-Chief, The French Troops in Syria, (Acting in the name of the French High Command).

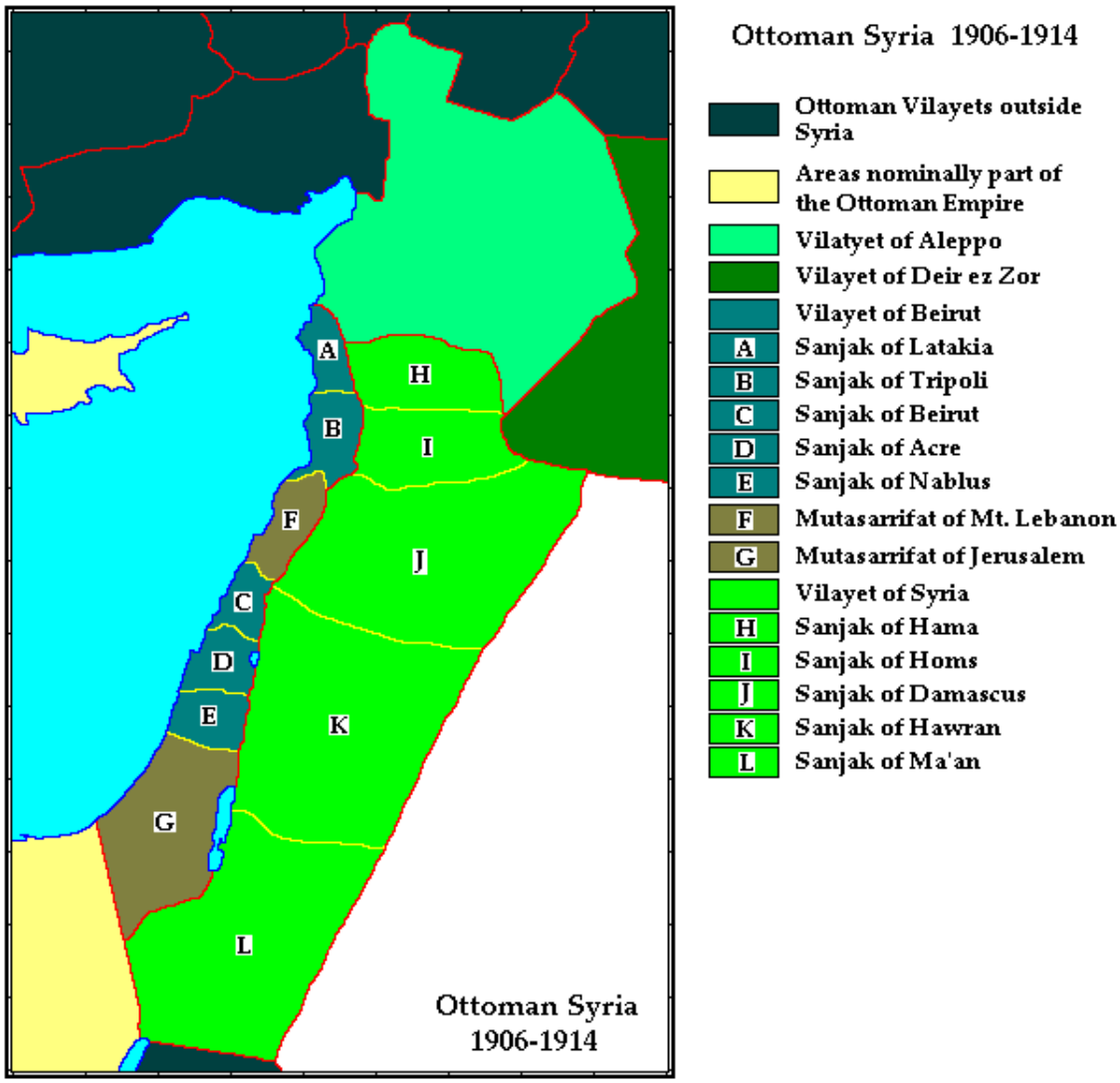
14*th July*, 1941.

Appendix 4

Maps

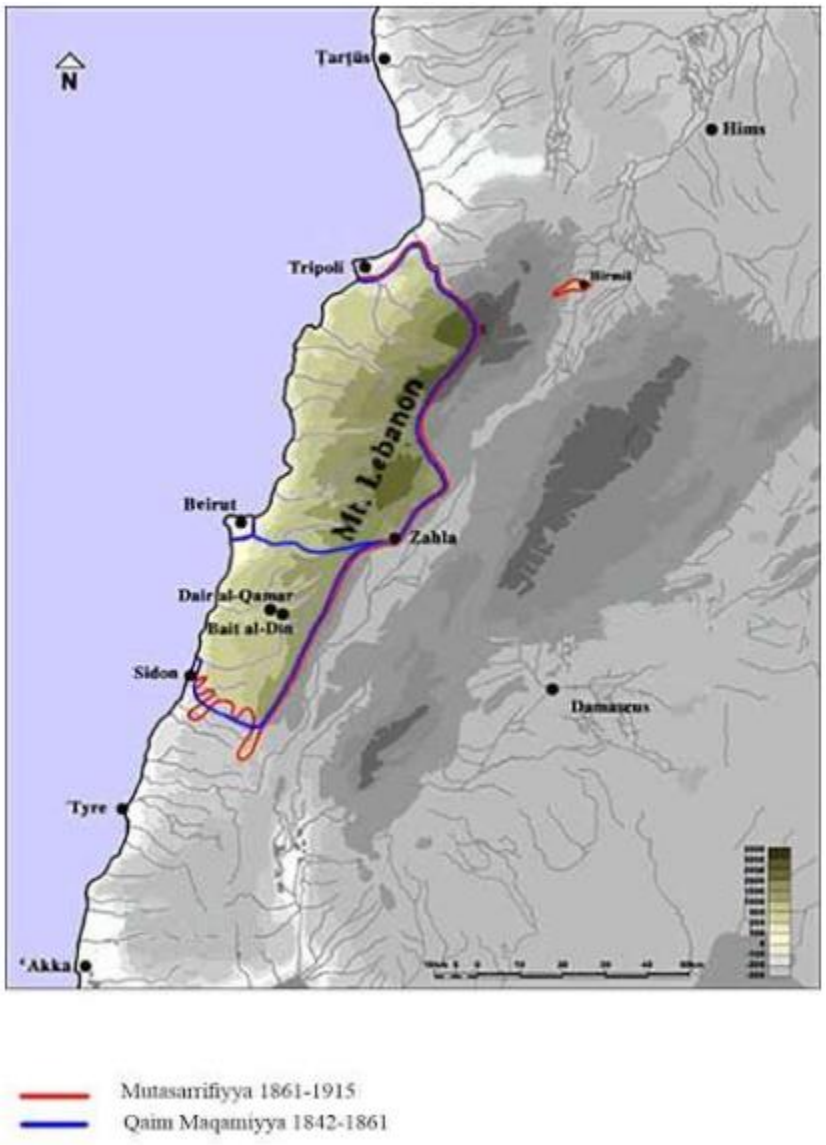
Map – 1 (Source: https://www.insightsonindia.com/world-history/unification-of-germany/)

Map - 2 (Source: http://mapoftheday.quickworld.com/posts/germanys-ww1-territorial-losses)

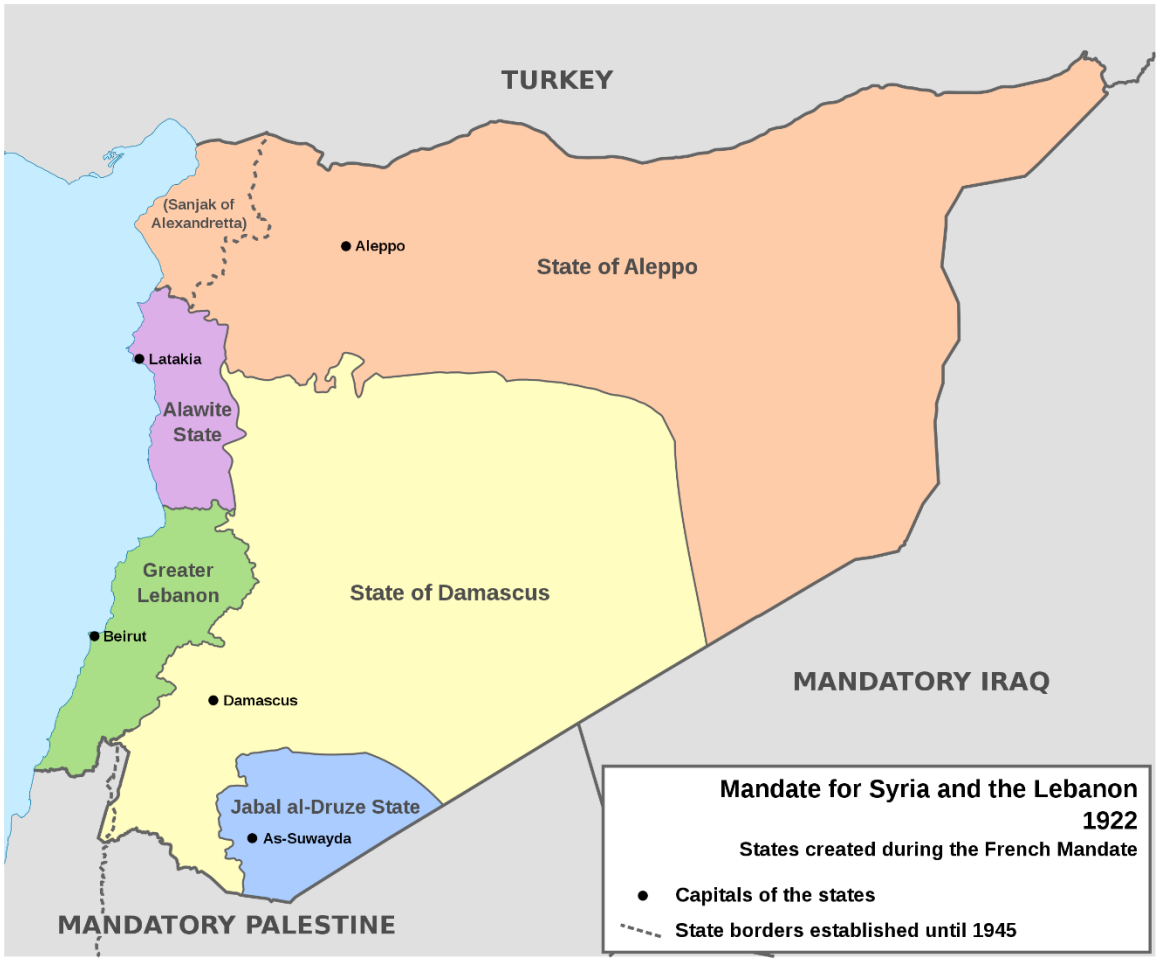


Map - 3

(Source: https://www.zum.de/whkmla/histatlas/arabworld/ottsyr19061914text.gif)



Map – 4 (Source: https://www.scielo.br/j/alm/a/FTYKB6qgMyzj3jfrZ9v9F4L/?lang=en#



Map – 5

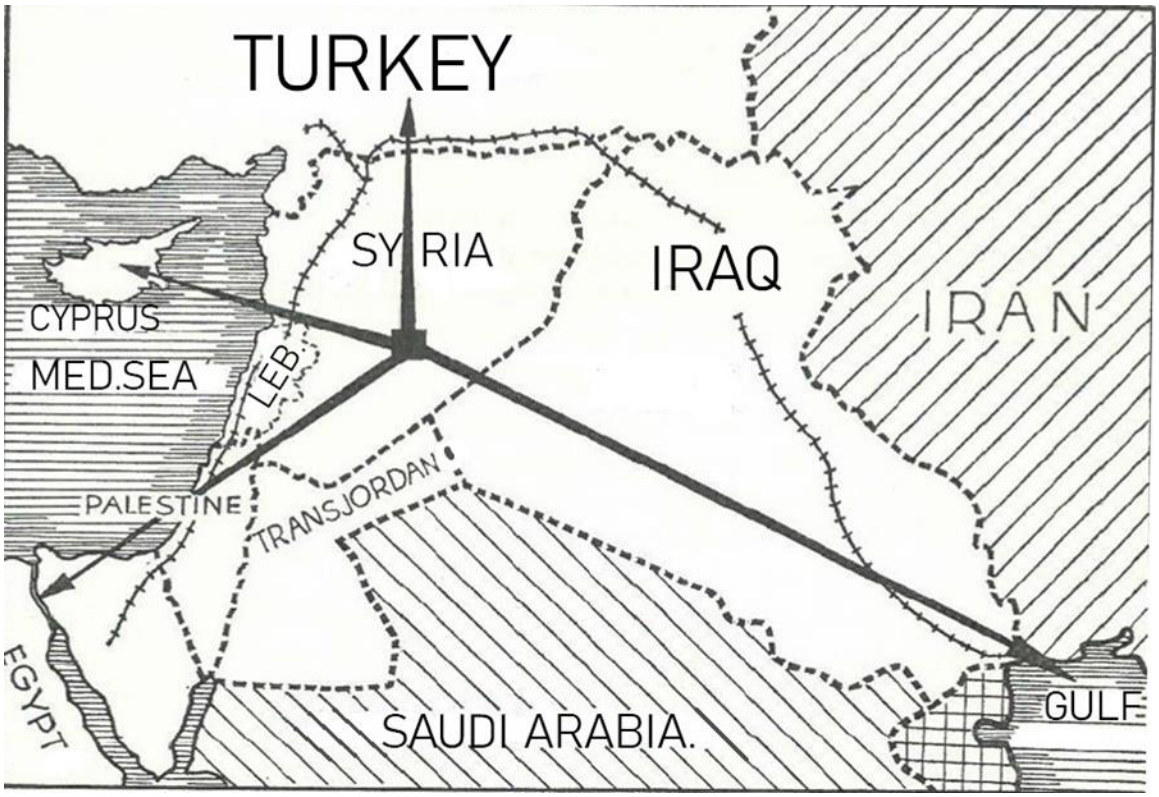
(Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Greater_Lebanon#Media/File:French_Mandate_for_Syria_and_the_Lebanon_map_en.svg)

Map – 6: **The German attack against France**

(Source: https://mrhts.wordpress.com/2014/08/02/august-2-1914-the-start-of-the-schlieffen-plan-germany-invades-luxemburg-100-years-since-wwi/)

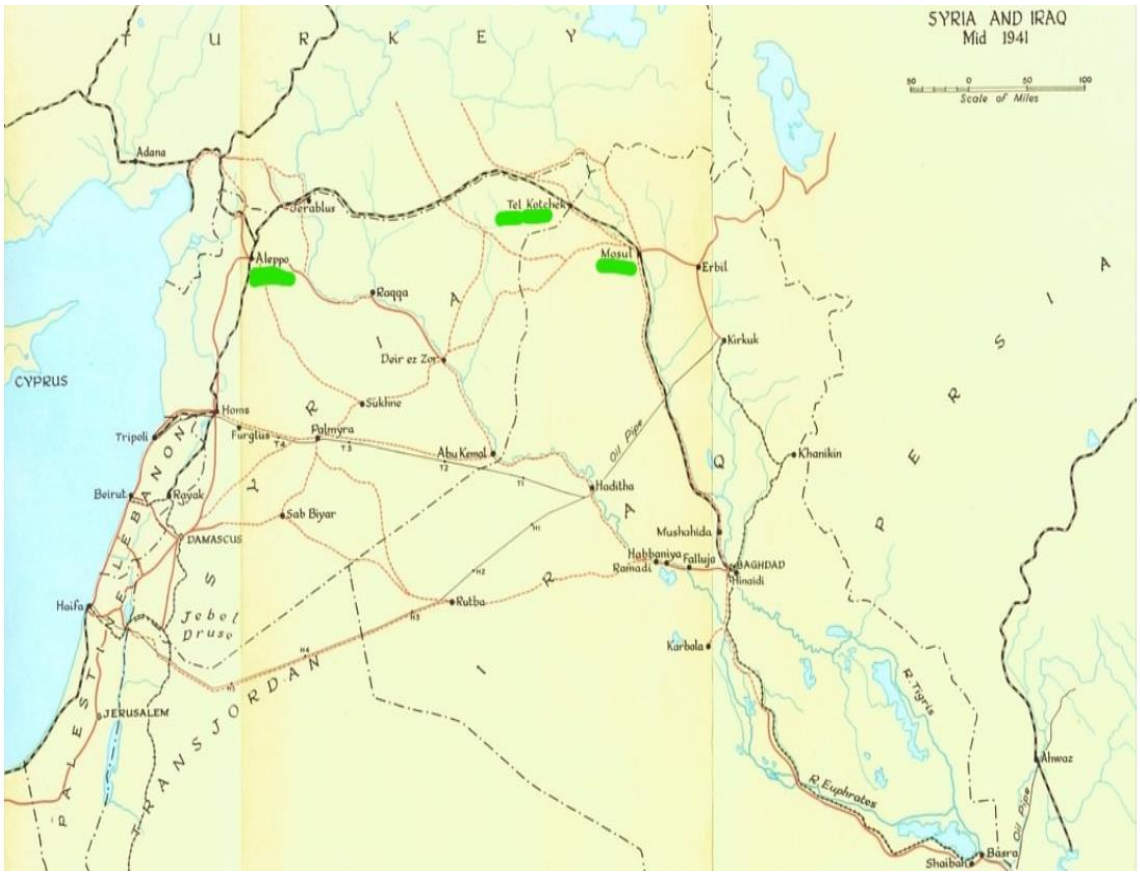
Map – 7

(Source: https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-France-World-War-II)



Map - 8

(Source: Lipschits, p. 63)



Map - 9

(Source: Playfair, map 17)

The Allied Invasion Plan

British High Command decided to advance with three columns, each roughly equal in strength. The Coastal Column comprised the Australian 21st Brigade and had Beirut as its objective. The Central Column comprised the Australian 25th Brigade and had Rayak as its objective. The Desert Column comprised the 5th Indian Brigade and the Free French Division, with Damascus as its objective.

Map – 10

(Source: James, p. 119)

Map – 11: **The Allied invasion of the Levant (*Operation Exporter)***

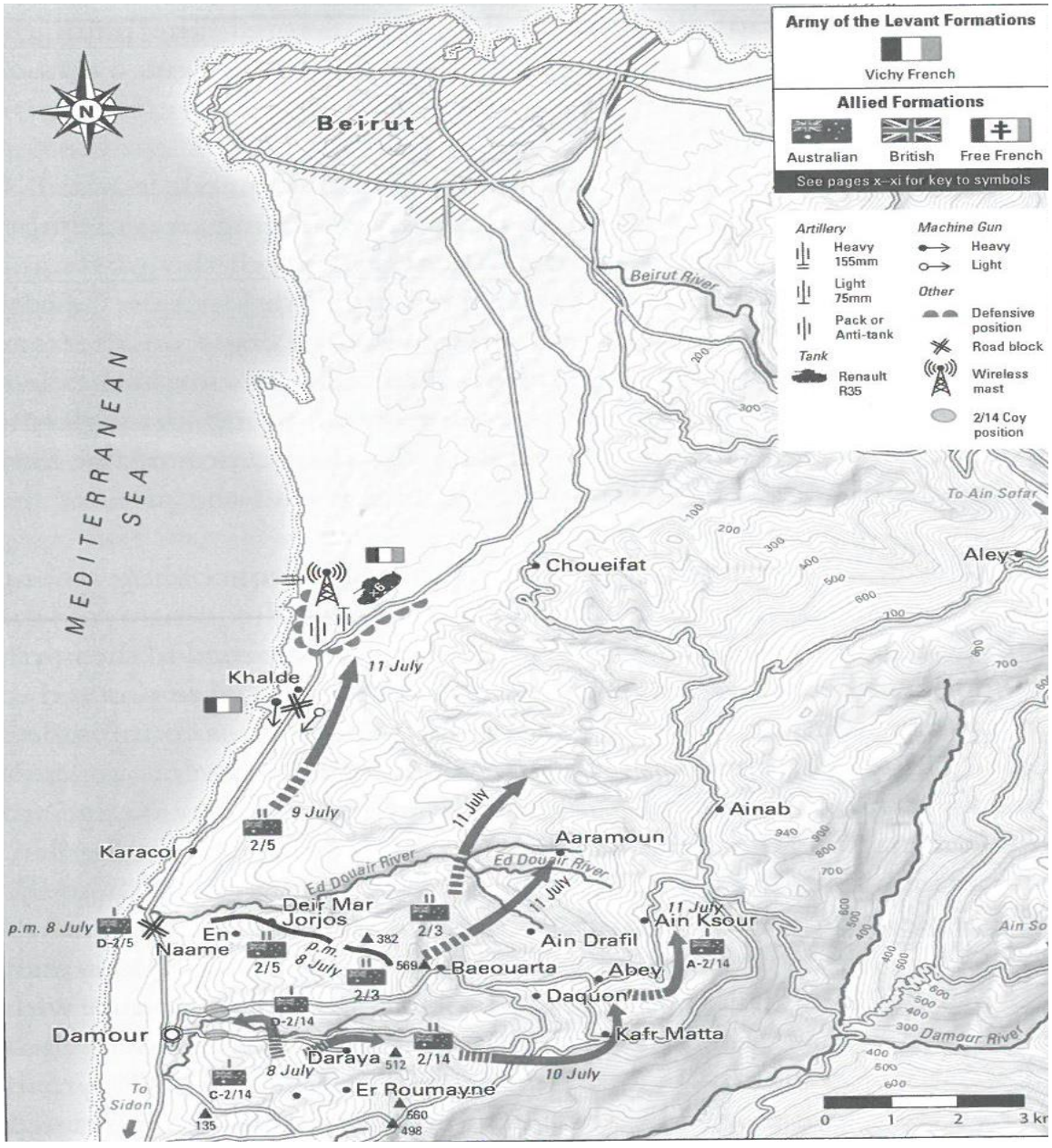
(Source: Bou-Nacklie, p. 516)

Map – 12: **The Allied invasion of the Levant (*Operation Exporter)***

(Source: Bou-Nacklie, p. 517)

Map -13: The **Allied advance towards Beirut**

(Source: James, p. 299)



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*The Arabic definite article "Al" situated before the names is **ignored**, while the German "von" and the French "de" before the names are **considered**.*

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